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THE MALANKARA SABHA

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ONE BODY OF CHRIST

AN ECUMENICAL GATHERING OF CHURCH LEADERS COMMEMORATING THE 1700TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

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His Holiness Writes...

Beloved in Christ,

As we prayerfully celebrate the joyous Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and stand at the threshold of a New Year, our heart is filled with gratitude to God Almighty, who guides history with His providential hand and sustains humanity with hope even amidst uncertainty. This sacred season invites us to contemplate the mystery of the Incarnation: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The birth of Christ in humility and obedience remains the eternal proclamation of God's love, justice and reconciliation offered to the whole world.

This concluding year holds deep ecclesial significance as the universal Church commemorates the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed, a foundational confession of our shared Christian faith. The Nicene faith continues to remind us that truth is not negotiable and unity is rooted in Christ Himself. It was indeed a moment of spiritual joy and ecumenical witness for us to be present in Turkey, the land where the historic Council of Nicaea was held, together with H.H. Pope Leo XIV and other Church

leaders, affirming our common commitment to the apostolic faith and the unity of the Church in today's fractured world.

Yet, even as we rejoice, the world around us groans in pain. Wars and violent conflicts in the Middle East, across parts of the African continent and in the Russian region continue to claim innocent lives and destroy the fabric of societies. Political ambitions, economic greed and misuse of power have turned many regions into fields of suffering. The cries of children, women and the displaced, challenge the conscience of humanity and call the Church to be a prophetic voice for peace. We are also deeply concerned about the growing religious intolerance, social unrest, poverty and widening economic inequality witnessed in many parts of the world. When religion is misused to divide and when human dignity is denied due to race, belief, or economic status, the very purpose of God's creation is wounded. The Church cannot remain silent in the face of injustice, nor indifferent to the suffering of the poor, the marginalized and the forgotten. The Malankara Orthodox Church considers the crores of rupees it spends each year on charitable and social welfare projects as a meaningful response to the suffering and cries of society.

As disciples of Christ, we are called to be bearers of peace and witnesses of compassion. Christmas reminds us that God entered history not through power, but through love; not through domination, but through self-emptying. The New Year therefore challenges us to renew our commitment to prayer, repentance, responsible citizenship, environmental stewardship and sincere service to humanity. With steadfast faith in God's promises, we look forward with hope to the emergence of a new world order rooted in justice, peace, mutual respect and shared responsibility. May nations learn the language of dialogue over violence, cooperation over conflict and compassion over indifference.

As we step into the New Year, may the Prince of Peace reign in our lives. Let the light that shone in Bethlehem illumine our paths and strengthen us to become instruments of God's healing in a wounded world. We invoke God's abundant blessings upon you all during this blessed Christmas season and the year ahead.

Baselios Marthoma Mathews III

Editorial

During Christmas time, a large number of people belonging to non-Christian religions used to come to Christian churches, especially to the Orthodox Churches in North India, to pay homage to Christ and share in the joy of the festive season. After offering prayers, they used to receive cakes as a kind of 'prasad' from those parishes. These gestures of devotion, love, and harmony have diminished or stopped by the escalation of the news about harassment, intimidation, and attacks on Christmas celebrations and churches, especially during the festival time this year. Perhaps one of the objectives behind such harassments is also the same.

At Christmas 2025, Christians across India faced a surge of attacks. It was growing in this land of pluralism and spirituality for a few years, and recently it became more widespread. Critics tried to deny or belittle it by saying that it was a rare occurrence exaggerated by a few people with political interests. But prominent national media personnel themselves took initiative to expose the truth with fact checks. In Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, a blind Christian woman at a Christmas gathering for disabled children was harassed by a lady leader with a particular religious affiliation. Some Sangh Parivar leaders were seen trying to highlight the issue of conversion in the context of such violence as if to justify such intolerance and harmful activities.

The Prime Minister of India attending Christmas service at a church in Delhi and offering greetings saying that 'the Spirit of Christmas inspires harmony and goodwill in our society' was really good news. However, the huge contradictions of this exhilarating gesture and the attacks unleashed by some of the fringe elements of the organizations that support the PM are now exposed. The Government of India has to ensure a meaningful 'Rajneethi' by taking appropriate impartial action against such extremists who ruin the beauty of the pluralistic nature of our country. Such attacks against any community are to be understood as against the constitution of the country, against the nation, against the humanizing potential of all religions, and against the marginalized in the society. In most of such hooliganism, the police stand as passive onlookers because of their fear of handling aggressive crowds and also fail to register cases against such antisocial elements. This paves the way for the crumbling of the rule of law in the country. It is also time to consider establishing a ministry in every state and at the national level to ensure peace and harmony, particularly among religious communities.

If the alleged forceful conversion to Christianity is true, stringent actions against the people behind it are also essential. Christian leaders must also take extra care to discourage such forced conversions if they are in practice. However, those who attack, justifying it as anti-conversion sentiments, are not only violating the rule of law but also disrespecting and denying the citizens' basic human right of freedom to choose. When an individual chooses to change a political party, will he or she also be attacked using this same logic. Misusing anti-conversion law as a cover to harass some people is also condemnable.

Leaders of all religions also have to play a significant role in highlighting the humanizing potential of religions and to oppose those miscreants from their respective religions who actually work against the core of their own religions. The legacy of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Vivekananda, and Mahatma Gandhi showed this nation the light of respecting other religions while being faithful to Hinduism. Similar initiatives across various religions are essential to ensure that religion promotes peace and harmony; without these efforts, new generations may view religions as a threat to society. Any attempt inspired by communal ideology that claims baseless affiliation to religion to spread animosity towards other individuals or communities is a sign of hating and rejecting God and one's own religion.

Christians must also take extra care not to organize Christmas programs in such a way as to project their communal egoism. If possible, even protests against injustice they experience also need to be expressed by joining with those harmony loving people belonging to various religions. The fact that Christianity has grown through persecution almost from its inception also gives us hope. Wishing you all a blessed, fruitful, and peaceful New Year.

Bijesh Philip Achen
Editor, Malankara Sabha English Quarterly

DENHO: THE DAWN THAT CONQUERED THE DARKNESS

Fr. Dr. Timothy (Tenny) Thomas

In the Syriac Christian tradition, the Feast of Theophany is not merely the remembrance of the Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ in the River Jordan, it is celebrated as *Denho*—the Dawn. This word is more than poetry. It is a proclamation of faith. In a world buried beneath shadows of sin, despair, fear, injustice, and death, *Denho* announces that a new light has broken into history. Not from the halls of emperors or the centers of power—but from the humility of the waters of the River Jordan.

Theophany, meaning the manifestation of God, is the moment when the hidden God reveals Himself openly: the Father speaks, the Son stands in the waters, the Spirit descends like a dove. And the earth, which had long sat in darkness, beholds its first true sunrise.

1. The World Before the Dawn

Scripture never romanticizes the darkness of the fallen world. It is described as chaos, exile, captivity, blindness, and death. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." (Isaiah 9:2)

Darkness in the Bible is not merely the absence of light—it is the absence of hope. It is the realm where humanity forgets its identity, where suffering feels endless, where sin becomes normal, and where death reigns like a tyrant. Spiritually speaking, darkness is the condition of the human heart without God. It is life without meaning, religion without life, morality without grace, strength without salvation. The world before Christ was not simply waiting for better rules—it was waiting for Light itself.

This is why *Denho* matters. The Dawn does not negotiate with the night. It ends it.....

2. Jordan: Where the Dawn Breaks

At the River Jordan, something unheard

of occurs: *The Sinless One steps into the waters of repentance. The Creator bows before His creation. The Judge stands in line with sinners.* This is not weakness—it is the strategy of divine light.

When Christ enters the River Jordan, He is not seeking purification. He is purifying the waters themselves. The entire creation was mystically baptized with Him. The waters that once symbolized chaos now receive the Seed of Life.

Here, *Denho* rises.

Christ does not defeat darkness by force, but by illumination. He does not destroy sinners, but transforms them. He does not curse the waters of the world—He makes them a womb of rebirth. This is why the Feast of Theophany is inseparable from Christian hope. Hope is not wishful thinking. Hope is not emotional optimism. Hope is the certainty that Light has already entered the darkness—and the darkness cannot overcome it.

3. Christ, the True Light

The Gospel does not call Christ a light. It calls Him the Light: "I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows Me shall not walk in darkness." (John 8:12)

Christ is not one teacher among many. He is not one flame among other flames. He is the Sun of Righteousness. All other lights borrow from Him. All other hopes depend on Him. At Theophany, the Church proclaims: *The Father reveals the Son, the Son reveals the Father, and the Spirit reveals divine life to the world*. This is why the Feast is called Theophany: God is no longer hidden behind clouds, laws, or veils. He stands visibly among us. The Dawn has a Face. The Light has a Name. Jesus Christ.

4. Denho in the Midnight of the Human Heart

Every human soul knows darkness. There is the darkness of grief. The darkness of addiction. The darkness of anxiety and depression. The darkness of guilt and shame. The darkness of unanswered prayers. The darkness of broken families. The darkness of fear about the future. In those moments, the soul whispers: Will the night ever end? *Denho* answers: Yes. The Light has already risen.

Christ does not merely shine on us—He desires to shine within us. Theophany is not only Christ's revelation at the Jordan; it is the beginning of His revelation inside the believer's heart. Every baptism is a personal Denho. Every repentance is a small sunrise. Every confession is a return from night into day. Every Eucharist is a flame kindled in the soul.

5. Theophany and the Meaning of Christian Hope

Christian hope is radically different from worldly hope. Worldly hope says: "Maybe things will improve." Christian hope says: "Even if they don't, Christ is still victorious."

Hope is not rooted in circumstances. It is rooted in Christ's victory over darkness. This is why martyrs could sing in prisons. This is why saints could rejoice in suffering. This is why believers can stand at graves and still proclaim resurrection. Because *Denho* has already come. The night may rage. The storm may howl. But the sunrise is not uncertain. It has already happened in Christ.

6. The Waters Still Remember Him

The early Church believed that the waters of the earth still remember the touch of Christ. This is why water becomes holy. This is why baptism is rebirth. This is why life itself can be healed. At Theophany we do not simply remember what happened — we participate in what is still happening. Christ still enters our chaos. Christ still sanctifies what is broken. Christ still calls us from darkness into Light. *Denho* is not only history. It is a living reality.

7. Living as Children of the Dawn

If Christ is the Light, and we are baptized into Christ, then the Church is not meant to reflect darkness but radiate *Denho* into the world. The Christian is called to be: light in workplaces full of corruption, light in families weighed down by division, light in societies trembling with fear, and light in cultures addicted to distraction. Not by pride. Not by force. But by holiness, humility, truth, compassion, and sacrificial love. The world does not need louder noise. It needs truer light.

Conclusion: The Dawn Cannot Be Stopped

Theophany proclaims the most dangerous truth to despair: Darkness is not eternal. No night, no sin, no wound, no grave, no devil, no empire, no failure can cancel the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. Christ has entered the waters. The heavens have opened. The Spirit has descended. The Father has spoken. The Dawn has begun. *Denho* has come. And because *Denho* has come, hope is no longer a dream—it is a Person. "Arise, shine, for your Light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." (Isaiah 60:1). May the Feast of Theophany remind every heart: No matter how deep the darkness, the Dawn of Christ always arrives.

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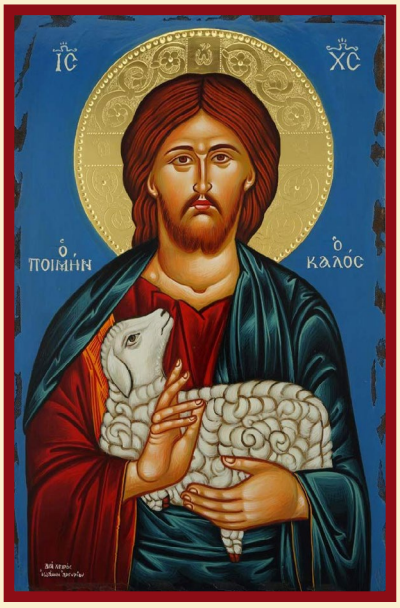


TRUE COMFORTERS:
RAYS OF HOPE IN THE DARKEST HOUR OF OUR LIFE

Fr. Yohannan K

Human beings are inherently social animals. We are meant to live in closeness with one another, in mutual understanding and cooperation. However, today, as people become increasingly enslaved to modern means of communication such as technology, artificial intelligence, and virtual friendships, they begin to question existing religious faith, belief in God, and even human relationships. Along with this, they also begin to lose connection with life's values, genuine human bonds, and their social responsibilities.

Moreover, they often find themselves unable to overcome difficult moments in life, to learn lessons from them, or to complement and support one another. As a result, despair, quarrels, jealousy, conflicts, and even suicide occur in life. In such circumstances, it is beyond doubt that one of the most important missions of the Holy Church is to descend into the true meaning and depth of human life and to bring comfort and hope to people.

In the Holy Scripture, we are familiar with many individuals who became comforters in the lives of others. Yet, it is also true that there are those who only pretend to be comforters, but in reality, cause others even more pain.

The Book of Job, a central text within the Wisdom Literature, gives a real and authentic picture of true comforters and provides an understanding of how we ourselves ought to become true comforters in the lives of others. Job is portrayed as a character who, through his own life, offers a new vision of God. While many other biblical figures shine as heralds of success and hope, Job is immortalized as a man of suffering. Not only is Job lifted up as a symbol of endurance, but he also represents unwavering trust in God. Along with his lofty insights, Job is also depicted as an ordinary human being who, in the midst of suffering, responds both to his friends and to God. What enables Job to lift his head before both

Job is portrayed as a character who, through his own life, offers a new vision of God. While many other biblical figures shine as heralds of success and hope, Job is immortalized as a man of suffering. Not only is Job lifted up as a symbol of endurance, but he also represents unwavering trust in God. Along with his lofty insights, Job is also depicted as an ordinary human being who, in the midst of suffering, responds both to his friends and to God.

humanity and God, and ask bold questions, is his life of integrity and righteousness.

Though he was righteous before both God and men, Job nevertheless had to endure severe calamities. He lost his wealth (Job 1:13–17), his children (1:18–19), and was stricken with painful sores all over his body (Job 2:7–8). Even his wife accused him (2:9), yet Job firmly resisted and deliberately reaffirmed his faith in God (2:10).

It is at this point that Job's three friends arrive. Friends who bring words of comfort during times of disaster are part of every culture. They came, grieving over the sufferings of their righteous friend. Sharing in his sorrow, they tore their robes, sprinkled dust upon their heads, and sat with him in silence for seven days (Job 2:11–13). They were Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite.

The first to speak was Eliphaz. In his view, it is impossible for a human being to justify himself before God. Therefore, Eliphaz emphasizes in his speeches that all human beings are unworthy before God (Job 4:1–5:27; 15:1–35; 22:1–30).

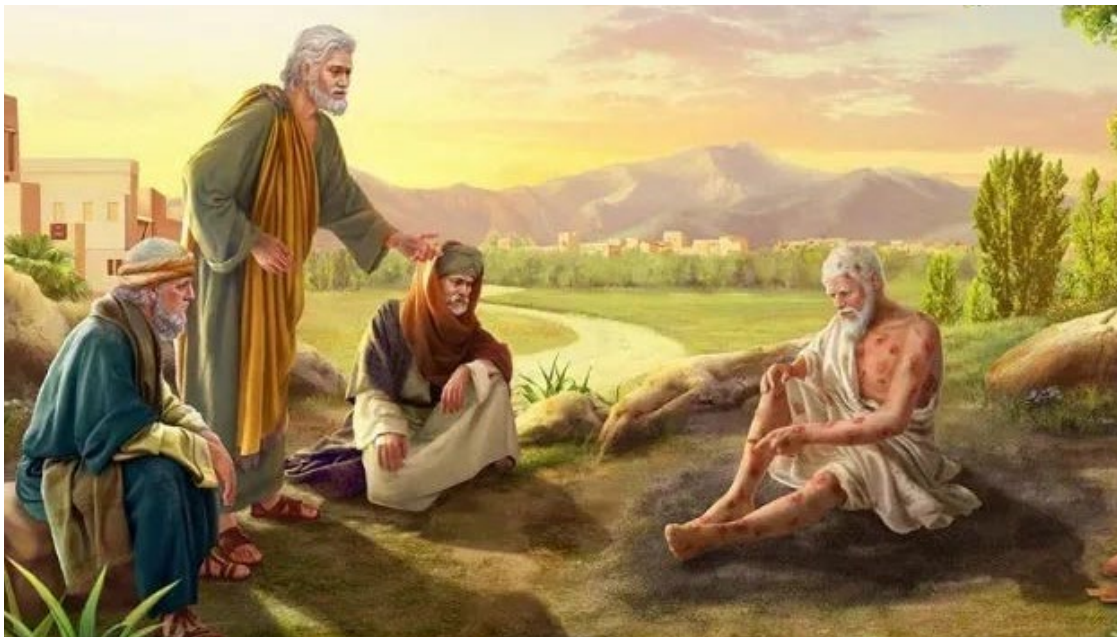
The second friend, Bildad, reminds Job—who had already declared himself righteous—that the cause of his suffering might be the sins of his children (Job 8:1–22; 18:1–21; 25:1–6). Bildad frames his accusation on the basis of the doctrine of the social consequences of sin. According to Bildad's reasoning, if the sins of Job's children led to their complete destruction, then Job too must experience some of the consequences.

The third companion, Zophar, describes Job as "an excessive talker." He criticizes Job's lengthy speeches, considering them to be attempts for self-justification (Job 11:1–20; 20:1–29). His advice is sharp: Your long speeches will not undo your wickedness. In fact, understand this—God has not yet punished you as much as your sins truly deserve. The punishment you have received is but little compared to what it could have been. Therefore, turn back to God (Job 11:6–15).

Thus, the three friends who had come to comfort Job, instead ended up accusing him, insisting repeatedly that his calamities were the result of his own guilt. But Job completely rejects their accusations. In Job 16:2, he responds, "You are all miserable comforters." This is a figure of speech called 'oxymoron' used in the book, in which, two terms that normally contradict each other are used together. Different Bible translations interpret the expression 'miserable comforters' in various ways. Here we seek to examine these interpretations in connection with the mission of the Church, so that we may also gain a deeper understanding of our own perspectives on the Church's mission.

1. "You are my miserable comforters" (Modern Translations)– Friends who make my pain even more unbearable.

When the people of God felt that they lacked the visible presence of Moses and of God for a short while in their journey to the



promised land, they built a golden calf and worshiped it (Exodus 32:1–20; Deuteronomy 9:6–29). Due to this, Moses broke the stone tablets written by the very hand of God. These people, who should have been a source of encouragement to Moses, ended up making his life more miserable.

Even though God was with them—providing water from the rock, manna and quail from heaven, a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night—time and again they rebelled against God and against Moses (Exodus 14:11–12; 15:23–24; 16:2–3; 17:1–3; 32:1; Numbers 11:1; 11:4–6; 14:2–4; 16:3; 20:2–5, etc.). Thus, instead of becoming comforters, they added more trouble to Moses' life.

In our own lives too, we sometimes find that the words and actions of certain people only make our suffering worse. On the surface, they may appear to be comforters, but in time their true colors are revealed. Though they may seem to stand with us in our sorrows, their real attitude is quite the opposite. These are the miserable comforters.

2. "You are my sorry comforters" (NASB Translation)— Friends who increase my sorrow even more.

At first glance, these words may sound like a paradox. Their real meaning is that those who come to us pretending to be comforters may actually end up deepening our grief. The Holy Bible bears witness to such figures. Instead of bringing comfort to others in their distress, some, through their words and actions, push them into even greater sorrow.

At the time when David's own son Absalom turned against him, David's close friend Ahithophel joined the conspiracy against him (2 Sam 16–17). In this betrayal, Ahithophel became a cause of deep sorrow for David (Ps 55).

A true missionary must never become a source of sorrow for others. Our words, actions, and deeds should instead become instruments of consolation and sources of strength.

3. "You are my painful comforters" (NEV Translation)— Friends who only increase my pain.

There are people who constantly add

to the pain of others. Through their words and their actions, they intensify suffering. From the outside, their false appearances may not be easily recognized.

The sorrow of the patriarch Jacob is an example of such pain. In the grief of losing his son Joseph, Jacob's sons and daughters came to comfort him. Yet, their words and their presence gave him no consolation at all (Gen 37:34–35). In reality, the other sons of Jacob were the very cause of his grief. Out of jealousy for Joseph's abilities, beauty, wisdom, and especially their father's special affection toward him (Gen 37:3), they went so far as to plot his destruction.

Though they were his own children and Joseph's brothers, they only brought pain to both their father and their sibling.

A true Christian missionary must be one who shows compassion toward the sufferings of others. By mere words or careless actions, we must never add to or deepen the wounds of those already in pain.

4. "It offers no comfort" (CEV Translation)—You give me no comfort in my pain

There are such people too— who do not comfort us in our grief and struggles. Much of today's society lives with the attitude that "Whatever happens to others, is none of my concern." We have become people without compassion or care for our fellow beings.

Though Hagar bore the son of patriarch Abraham, she was still treated merely as a servant. Abraham, who had the responsibility to support her, instead turned away. Left alone in the wilderness, Hagar cried out, unable to bear watching her child die (Genesis 21). She was a helpless woman, weeping with no one to comfort her, and abandoned by those responsible for her.

We have also become like King Ahab, who, despite being a king, coveted the land of Naboth, a simple farmer of his own people (1 Kings 21). We resemble the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), whose numbers seem only to increase in our world today.

Job's friends were of the same kind. Their conduct and their manner of speaking did not bring comfort to Job, instead deepened the wounds within him. That is why Job made such a strong remark about them.

In the end, we learn that they themselves stood guilty before God (Job 42:7). The three friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—who came to show sympathy for Job's suffering, ironically became accusers. Yet Job himself became their refuge. Their only way of escape from the wrath of God was through Job's intercession (Job 42:8–10).

Conclusion

In the midst of suffering, each of us must learn to become a companion—someone to lean on, someone with whom pain can be shared, questions can be asked, and both harmony and disagreement are acceptable. This is our true mission as Christians.

Through His public ministry, Christ himself revealed this mission to the world. It is clearly expressed in His famous Nazareth Manifesto (Lk 4:16–21). Christ stood as a refuge for the poor, the oppressed, the afflicted, the enslaved, the tax collectors, and the prostitutes—He was always with them.

That same Christ is our guide. May God prepare us to understand others more deeply, to bring true comfort into their sorrows—not like the friends of Job— and to become genuine comforters in their lives—so that our mission too may gain a new and greater perspective.

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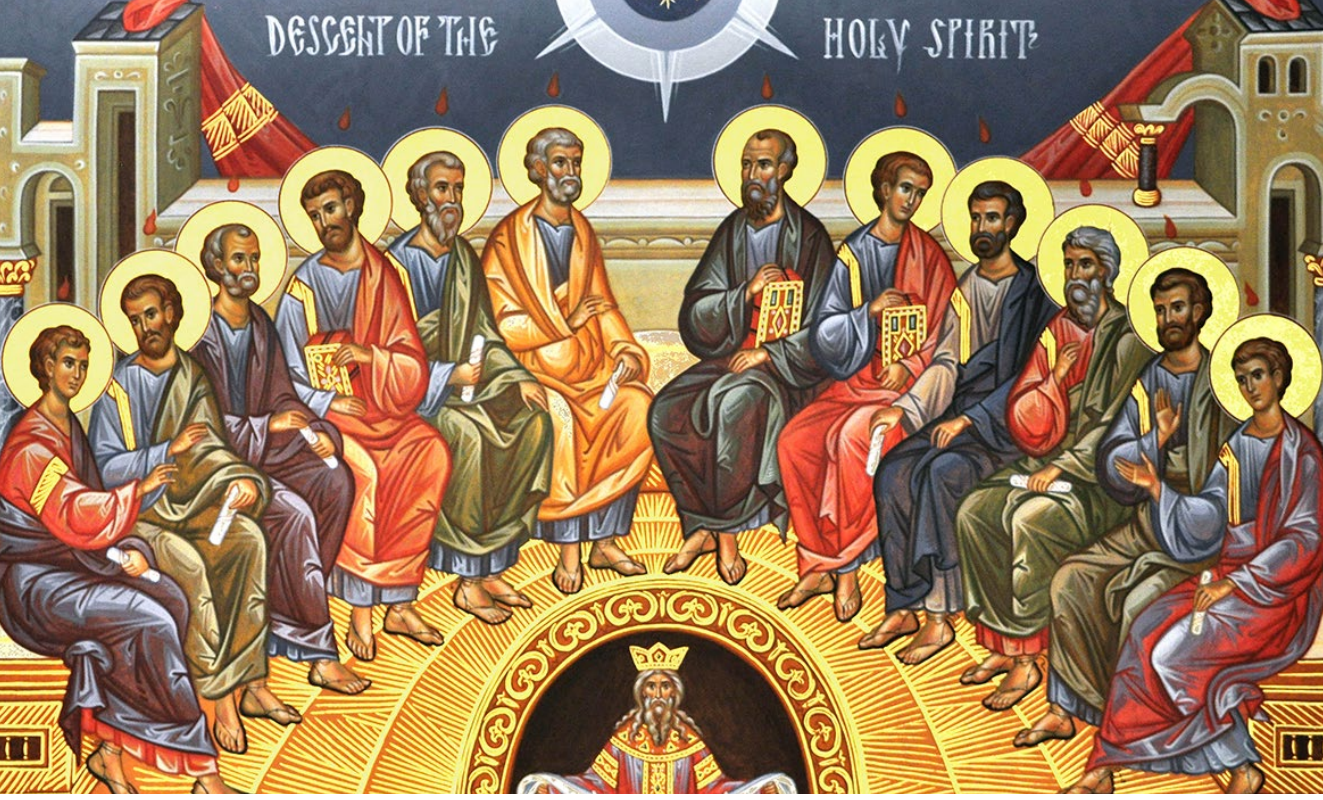

Arise and Shine…

Fr. Baiju Thomas

The very foundation of the Christian mission is laid in the commissioning of Jesus, "As Father has sent me, even so, I send you" (Jn 20:21) and "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations…" (Mt. 28:19). The Christian mission is sharing God's love revealed in Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, as demonstrated in His life and ministry. The Apostles embodied these principles in their ministry. The Christian leaders attracted and influenced the people from diverse sections of society through their words and deeds as an expression of the actualisation of the divine light they received.

Jesus Christ reveals Himself as Light and calls His followers to become the light. Three declarations in His ministry underline the Christian mission as the illumination of the world through the divine light.

Jesus is the Light of the World (Jn 8:12)

This declaration proclaims that Jesus Christ is the source of all illumination - the divine Light who dispels darkness and reveals the Father. The mission of God in Jesus is the salvation and redemption of humanity (Jn 3:16). God took human form to reconcile humanity to Himself (2 Cor. 5:18-20), thereby dispersing the darkness that enveloped humanity. The Tuesday evening meditational prayer expresses this longing for divine light: "… As the daylight

has ended, may Your radiant cross be as light to us. As the day has ended, shed the light of Your Lordship upon us…." This highlights humanity's constant need for God's presence and protection. Therefore, God Himself is the initiator of the mission; His glory empowers the people. Recognition of the divine light leads to proclaiming the Gospel, as the Apostles did, thus revealing that 'mission' is fundamentally theocentric. Mission flows from divine revelation and presence; the Church participates in this mission and radiates God's light. As St. Gregory of Nazianzen affirms, "He is Light of Light, the true light that makes us to become light." Thus, the Church has no mission apart from the encounter with Christ, the Light of the world.

His Disciples are the Light of the World (Mt 5:14-16)

The second declaration occurs in the 'Sermon on the Mount,' where Jesus exhorts, "You are the light of the world… let your light shine before others." This is a participatory extension of His divine light to the faithful. According to St. John Chrysostom, "He calls them the light of the world, not because they shine by their own nature , but because they reflect the true light." This reminds all believers that they are called to be carriers of divine light. This is the heart of Orthodox mission—a sacramental and Eucharistic mission. When the mission radiates the true light of Christ, missionaries become proclaimers of God's 'economy of salvation' through their acquisition and dispersion of the sacramental gifts. In the Friday Vespers (Shehimo) the church prays, 'the prophets and the apostles are likened to Shining stars in the creation. They enlighten the earth by their pure doctrine. So, Christ called them light'. Mission, therefore, means shining Christ's light into the world through pure teaching, love, justice, truth, compassion, and service.

John the Baptist was a Burning and Shining Light (Jn 5:35)

The third declaration refers to John the Baptist as a testimony to his mission. From a missiological perspective, 'burning' signifies inner zeal and holiness, while 'shining' expresses outward witness to Christ. Mission thus comprises inner purification and outward proclamation. Every missionary is called to be a witness (martyr) who embodies and reflects Christ's light. St. Gregory of Nyssa states, "John was burning with love and shining with truth." The Church is therefore called to witness the eternal self-offering of Christ by burning with inner holiness and shining through outward mission. St. Gregorios of Parumala, in his travelogue, Oorslem Yathra Vivaranam (A Journey to Jerusalem), describes the special event that takes place at the Resurrection Church, known as Puthen Thee (New Fire). This can be seen as a symbol of the Orthodox mission. The inner power and holiness that pour out from the Tomb of Jesus Christ illuminate the world through His followers. Throughout his life, St. Gregorios exemplified this burning and shining light.

Conclusion

Christian mission is the illumination through the divine light to dispel the darkness of the world.. The three declarations of Jesus call us to recognise, participate in, and radiate His light—through holy living and faithful witness. Mission is, therefore, a calling to reflect and testify to Christ as His true emissaries in this world. As Isaiah proclaims: "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you" (Is 60:1).

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The Introduction of the West Syrian Liturgy in Malankara

Malankara Malpan Dr. Johns Abraham Konat Reesh Cor-episcopa

In the course of its long history, the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar, otherwise known as the Malankara Nazranikal, had to undergo various influences. It is historically established and accepted by most of the modern historians that from a very early period onwards the Christians of the Malabar coast had intimate contacts with the Persian church. Consequently, the liturgy of this Christian community was East Syrian until the arrival of the Portuguese in the 15th century. Unfortunate incidents in the history of the church, like the Synod of Diamper and the Oath of the Coonan cross, divided the church into two in the 17th century. The faction which accepted the Roman fellowship began to be known as the Syro-Malabar Rite and they continued to use the ancient East Syrian liturgy even though it was Latinized to a certain extent. The other group, nicknamed as the Puthencoor by their rivals, also might have continued to use the East Syrian liturgy for a period. But as the historical events which followed compelled them to enter into an intimate fellowship with the West Syrian church of Antioch, it was only natural that they gradually accepted the West Syrian liturgy also. This transition was slow and it is this process which is the subject of the present study.

The Puthencoor Christians found themselves in a vacuum after the Oath of the Coonan Cross. They had no legitimately ordained bishop. Even though they tried to bridge the gap by ordaining the then Archdeacon as Mar Thoma - I, his episcopacy was questioned because he was ordained by 12 priests without the presence of another duly ordained bishop. So they were trying to legitimize the ordination of Mar Thoma - I. They sent messages and missionaries to many eastern churches so that a bishop might rightfully consecrate Mar Thoma I as the Bishop of the Malankara Church. Their main concern was to get the assistance of a church which has Syriac as its liturgical language. As a result of these appeals, Mar Gregorios Abdul Jaleel of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch came to Malankara in 1665. Whether he formally consecrated Mar Thoma I is a disputed question. Nevertheless, his arrival marked the beginning of a close relation between the Malankara Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. Other Antiochian prelates followed. Mar Andreyos (1678), Baselios Yaldo (1685), Mar Ivanios Hidayathula (1685), Mar Baselios Shakralla and Mar Gregorios (1751) were a few who came from the Syrian Orthodox church. There were disputes and conflicts about ordinations and jurisdiction right from the beginning. There were ups and downs in the relation between the two churches, but on the whole West Syrian influence grew increasingly stronger during the 18th and 19th centuries. The West Syrian prelates who came during this period brought liturgical texts and the Malankara church gradually accepted them all replacing their old East Syrian liturgies. In fellowship with the Antiochians they began to call themselves the 'Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church', the name used in this article.

When was the West Syrian liturgy finally accepted by the faction in Malankara which rejected the synod of Diamper? It is difficult to believe that Mar Gregorios Abdul Jaleel changed all the customs and traditions of the Malankara Orthodox Syrians in one sweep. According to Cyril Malancharuvil, (later Major Archbishop Mar Baselios), "Mar Gregorios did not do anything new, except that he said holy mass in Antiochian liturgy. Neither the doctrine of Jacobitism nor the Antiochian liturgy was openly propagated by him."[1] What he could do was to restore some Syrian traditions which were lost through Latinization which followed the Synod of Diamper[2]. The restoration of the use of leavened bread for the Eucharist, the use of traditional vestments for the liturgy and the re-introduction of the old liturgical calendar were the main reforms he could bring into effect in Malankara[3]. The person who started to encourage the ancient custom of marriage of priests was Mar Ivanios who arrived from Syria in 1685. He could also introduce the habit of praying while standing instead of kneeling and the celebration of liturgy only on Sundays during lent[4]. By the time Mar Ivanios expired (1693) the Malankara church might have accepted the doctrinal stand of the Syrian church, says Malancharuvil. He bases his argument on the fact that the teachings of Mar Gabriel who was Nestorian, who arrived in 1705 were rejected by the Malankara church[5]. He further adds that even though the Antiochian teachings were accepted, their liturgy was not in practice in Malankara. But the reasons he gives are not very convincing[6]. His argument that the use of the liturgy of St. James in Malankara began only after 1751, does not seem plausible. The statement seen in a manuscript kept now in Bangalore, that "after his death (death of Mar Abraham, the last Persian bishop of Malabar) the Portuguese heretics changed the traditions of the Syrians: the fast, the Mass and feasts. After this, in the year 861 (i.e. A. D. 1686) during the time of Metropolitan

Mar Ivanios, the traditions of the Orthodox Syrians were resumed as before: fast, Mass and feasts"[7], is interpreted by Malancharuvil to suit his argument. He concludes that what Ivanios did was only a restoration of the old Chaldean liturgy. But to believe that Ivanios, an Antiochian bishop did allow the practice of Chaldean liturgy is difficult. The Antiochians being non-Chalcedonians who professed the one nature Christology were the worst enemies of Persians who were Nestorians professing the two- nature doctrine. Ivanios, also known as Hidayathulla, was a person who tried his best to enforce Antiochian traditions in Malankara. So, as Malancharuvil himself remarks, it is quite unlikely that he celebrated Mass according to the Chaldean rite while in Malankara or that he encouraged its use in the churches. If at all he made any introduction or change, it would have been the West Syrian liturgy. The manuscript in question was written nearly 40 years after the death of Ivanios, which means that the author was most probably not writing his own experience, but only what he heard from his ancestors, which need not be : entirely accurate.

The witness of Van der Ploeg, who has conducted a thorough and extensive research of manuscripts in Kerala, is also important. According to him, the Antiochian prelates first tried to introduce their Eucharistic liturgy. The other ceremonies remained unchanged for a long time. The use of Eastern Syriac scripts persisted for a much longer period among the Syrian Orthodox of Malankara. The script was eradicated completely in the beginning of the 2nd quarter of the 19th century. There was a period when even the texts of West Syrian Eucharistic liturgy were copied in East Syriac[8]. According to Van der Ploeg, such manuscripts appear in Malankara from the second half of the 17th century itself, which is ample proof to the fact that West Syrian liturgy had taken root in Kerala much earlier than the date proposed by Malancharuvil[9]. Manuscript No. 5, copied in 1662, containing an order of Eucharist and preserved at the bishop's house in Anjoor, is but one example[10].

It is difficult to assert that the Antiochian prelates who came before 1751 did not try to spread their liturgy in the Malabar coast. In my opinion, they might not have succeeded fully in their endeavor, but most probably all of them would have used St. James liturgy and might have enforced it at least in the areas where they could exert influence. All of them might have brought liturgical books with them and left a few behind. Conflicting reports by different individuals regarding the use of St. James liturgy as suggested by Malancheruvil himself[11], also point to the fact that during the first half of 18th century it was in use in some places, but that it acquired overall acceptance gradually during the second half of the 18th century. The protestant influences in the 19th century paved the way for an exclusive acceptance of all the West Syrian liturgical ordos.

The arrival of Mar Baselios Sakrallah, Mar Gregorios and Ramban Youhanan (later ordained Bishop by name Ivanios) in 1751 was a milestone in the spread of west Syrian liturgy in Malankara. They brought with them manuscripts of most of the important sacraments and prayer books which were copied in Kerala. Even though we have not looked for manuscript evidence in all the libraries of Kerala, the books found in the Konat library bear witness to the hectic copying activity which was under way all throughout the 19th century. There is one manuscript copied in 1749 containing St. James liturgy and the ordo of other important sacraments[12]. Most of the other books of liturgy are copied in the 19th century.

Printing of liturgical books

It goes without saying that books became popular with the beginning of printing.

The first book which was printed for the Orthodox Syrian community of Malankara in West Syrian script was the New Testament. When Claudius Buchanan, a chaplain of the East India Company, who advocated for the translation of the Bible into Indian languages, and was considered a bridge between European Christianity and Indian Christian traditions, visited the Malankara Metropolitan Mar Dionysius I in 1806. Mar Dionysius I gave Buchanan a copy of the Bible which was preserved here since a very long time. It was published by Buchanan from London in 1816.

In its first edition, readings for Sundays and Feasts according to the West Syrian lectionary were also indicated. Presses for printing liturgical books were established in Kerala from the second half of the 19th century. A book of West Syrian common prayer (ktobo daslutho d'shimo) printed in 1861 in the litho press of Philipose Cor-episcopa of Edavazhikkal is the first West Syrian liturgical book printed in Malankara as far as I could trace. This book was printed by the order of Mar Yuyakim Kurilose. It needs special mention that this book does not contain the prayer for Sundays (Kyomtho), which was brought to Malankara later. Pulikkotil Mar Joseph Dionysius II was another person who gave importance to printing. While he was a priest, he printed a book containing the St. James liturgy, the ordos of baptism and marriage[13]. Later in 1870 he started the St. Thomas press in Kochin and printed some of the important liturgical books both in Malayalam and Syriac. The service book of the Eucharist (Kthobo de thesmestho de kurobo) which was published in 1875 by Abraham Kathanar, Palappillil, was printed at this press. A Small book by name "Nadapadi Kramangal" printed in this press in 1877 is quite interesting. It is a Malayalam translation of a bull from the Patriarch, Peter III of Antioch, correcting some of the liturgical practices of that age which were practiced in Malankara. It gives a clear insight into the rubrics of that epoch as well as the changes which were instituted by the patriarch.

The establishment of another printing press at Pampakuda in 1879 by name "Kerala Deepam" was another incident which gave impetus to the generalization and standardization of the West Syrian liturgy in the Malankara Syrian church. The press was started by Konat Geevarghese Mar Julius Metropolitan. After his demise, it was named as Mar Julius press and was run by his successors from the Konat family. The book of prayer for lent and the lectionary were the first ones to be published. In 1880 the book for the order of service for burial of the dead was published and during the following years all the important Syriac liturgical books such as the ordo of St. James' liturgy, the book of special services of important feasts (Kthobo d'madedono), the book of common prayer, the ordo of burial of priests, mid-day prayers, ordo of sacraments of marriage, baptism etc. were published from here. Finally in 1962 the book of Penquito – prayers for all the feasts of a year – was edited by Konat Abraham Malpan and published according to the instruction and under the supervision of the Catholicos Mar Baselios Geeverghese II.

In 1889 another press named "St. Thomas press" started printing books from the Old Seminary, Kottayam. A few liturgical books were published from this press under the supervision of Pulikottil Mar Joseph Dionysius II. The periodical named 'Idavaka Pathrika' was also published from this press from 1892 onwards.

Malayalam Translations

The only book which was translated in the first half of the 19th century was the Holy Bible. This translation done by Kayamkulam Philipose Ramban, Timmaya

Pilla and others was printed in Bombay in 1811 by Claudius Buchanan. During this period the liturgy was either chanted in Syriac or experts in the language used to translate them instantaneously . As far as printing of Malayalam liturgical books are concerned the first one in my finding is the order of service of the Eucharist (Kurbana Kramam) published in 1869 from the Western Star press Kochin by Joseph Kathanar. This book contains only very few songs in Malayalam. One or two songs are Malayalam transliterations. In 1890 another Kurbana Kramam was published from Kottayam Seminary press, which does not contain any songs. Besides, it gives only the portions to be said by the congregation; the readings of the deacon are not printed. Another interesting feature of this book is that it has a set of prayers to be recited by the congregation while the deacon reads the diptychs (thubden)[14]. Several editions of this book were published later. A fuller version of this book with morning prayers, songs and all the readings of the deacon was translated and published only in 1902. The translation work was started by Mar Gregorios of Parumala and was completed by the two Malpans of Kottayam Old seminary, Mar Dionysius Vattasseril and Konat Mathen Cor-episcopa. The songs were composed according to the Syriac meter by Kandathil Eapen Geevarghese. Mathen Cor-episcopa translated a few more books to Malayalam during the early 20th century, of which the prayer book – known as Pampakuda Namaskaram – is the most important. He started the translation of the Bible, but could not finish it. It was later published by his son Abraham Malpan and his disciple Mar Baselios Augen Catholicos.

We had to wait till 1920 to see a full Malayalam version of the St. James liturgy. Translating the ordo of the Eucharist was perhaps seen as a serious offence until this. The combined effort of deacon Mookencheril Pathrose and deacon Joseph Pulikottil is really commendable. Later the same book was translated by Mattackal Alexander Kathanar (in 1937) and by Konat Abraham Malpan (in 1957). Both these translations are used today in the Orthodox Syrian church.

The important translators of liturgy during the second half of the 20th century were Mar Baselios Augen Catholicos, Mar Baselios Mar Thoma Mathew I Catholicos, Youhanon Mar Severios Metropolitan and Konat Abraham Malpan. The name of C.P Chandy needs special mention because he was the poet who composed the Malayalam songs according to the Syriac meter which appear in most of the translations of this period. Even though he was not well versed in Syriac language he composed songs from portions translated into Malayalam prose by others.

Concluding Remarks

Even though West Syrian connections with the Malankara church began in the second half of the 17th century, the liturgy of that church could attain overall acceptance in Malankara only much later. By the end of the 17th century the Syrian Orthodox doctrine was established in Malankara. The prelates who came in the 17th and early 18th centuries would have brought in West Syrian liturgical books and started their use, especially in places where they could exert influence. But their use might not have spread to all the churches

of Malankara during this period. St. James liturgy attained wider, exclusive and official acceptance gradually during the second half of the 18th century. Other West Syrian ordos also reached Malankara during the late 18th and 19th centuries. The establishment of printing presses in Kerala during the second half of the 19th century resulted in the wider acceptance, standardization and official recognition of the West Syrian liturgy. Malayalam translations also started appearing during this period which continued throughout the 20th century.

End notes:

1. Cyril Malancharuvil, The Syro-Malankara Church, Alwaye, 1973, p. 75

2. Ibid.

3. Malancheruvil affirms this on the authority of Paulinus, Ibid., p. 77

4. Ibid., p. 77

5. Ibid., p. 78

6. His argument is based on one sentence seen in a letter written by Mar Thoma V and the report sent to propaganda fide in 1750 stating that the missal reformed by Roz is still in use among the Puthencoor Christians. Ibid., p. 79, 82

7. Ibid., p. 80

8. Van der Ploeg, The Syriac Manuscripts of St. Thomas Christians, Bangalore, 1983, p. 29-30.

9. Ibid., p. 84.

10. Ibid., p. 153.

11. Ibid., 85

12. Ms. No. 34 of Konat Library. Ms. No. 164 is a copy of the ordination service copied in 1697 in the middle east. But we don't know when it was brought to Malabar.

13. The Date of the edition is not given. He was ordained Bishop in 1864. Book no. 108. It was printed in a litho press at Kunnamkulam.

14. A few writers have misunderstood these prayers as a shorter version of the diptychs.

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RENEWED LIGHT
FOR A RENEWED LIFE

A REFLECTION ON THE NEW YEAR AND THE FEAST OF DENEHA

Fr. Nithin V. Rajan

Introduction

Across the world, New Year celebrations are filled with joy, hope, and anticipation. People make resolutions, set goals, and dream of better days. Yet the Orthodox Christian tradition pushes us deeper than self-improvement. It teaches that true renewal begins not in our willpower but in the conversion of our heart—in returning to God.

For Christians, the New Year closely aligns with one of the most significant feasts of the Church: Deneha - also known as Theophany or Epiphany. While the world celebrates the beginning of a new calendar year, the Church marks the manifestation of God through the baptism of Jesus Christ in the River Jordan. This coincidence encourages us to view time not just as hours and years but as moments touched by divine grace.

The New Year invites us to redirect, renew, and restructure our priorities. Deneha reveals Christ, the Light of the World, who enters time to transform it. When we celebrate these two events together, we are reminded that Christian renewal is not just about making resolutions but about receiving revelations—about letting the Light of Christ shine through our lives so that our renewal progresses toward 'Theosis'.

Understanding Time

Christianity sees time as more than just a sequence of days. Time is sacred history, the ground where God acts. The Scriptures describe time as both 'Chronos'—the measurable unfolding of days—and 'Kairos'—God's appointed time of grace. The New Year marks a new cycle of Chronos, but Deneha reveals a new Kairos.

Chronos encompasses the duration of our lives, governing our day-to-day activities and existence. Kairos is closely connected to eschatology, emphasizing pivotal moments that shape or alter history, often associated with God's intervention or the fulfilment of a prophecy. While calendars change automatically, hearts change only when touched by divine grace.

Saint Basil the Great says, "Every moment becomes new when it is lived in Christ." Therefore, Christian renewal is not just about emotional enthusiasm; it is a spiritual awakening in which the believer reorients himself toward God's purpose. The New Year serves as a reminder that time is finite and valuable; Deneha shows that Christ enters into time to redeem it.

New Year is a time for Gratitude

Gratitude is the best attitude in life. When we look back on life, let us not look with regret or pride, but with thanksgiving; then we will understand that our failures were opportunities for grace and our successes were gifts from God. The New Year begins best when we start with gratitude. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Psalm 103:2).

New Year's resolutions often fail because they deal with the surface; repentance deals with the root. Repentance—'Metanoia'—means a change of direction, a turning of the heart. It is the recognition that we cannot make ourselves new, but the Holy Spirit can. The Church teaches that repentance is not sorrow alone; it is transformation. It is a rising from the old self and an embrace of the new life given in baptism—a theme that directly takes us into Deneha. As Orthodox Christians, the New Year is a moment to renew our commitments:

Deneha: The Feast of Divine Manifestation

The word 'Deneha' means illumination, manifestation, or appearance. Deneha is also called the Feast of Lights. On this day, the Holy Trinity is revealed: this is not just a symbolic act but a divine declaration. Christ sanctifies creation, blesses the waters, and inaugurates His public ministry. The heavens, once closed by sin, are opened. The Light of God shines upon the world. Saint Ephrem the Syrian beautifully says: "The River Jordan saw You and trembled; The waters saw the True Light and blessed the earth."

Christ did not need cleansing; He is pure. Instead, by entering the water, He sanctifies all creation. He identifies Himself with humanity's brokenness. He reveals Himself as the Lamb who will take away the sins of the world. He renews the world from within. The Great Blessing of Water is a distinct feature of Deneha. The sanctified water symbolizes the renewal of creation, the cleansing of our hearts, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in ordinary life. We take this water home, sprinkle it, and drink it because it is a sign that the grace of God accompanies us into our daily lives.

New Year and Deneha: A Spiritual Synthesis

New Year and Deneha meet at a beautiful

intersection: renewal and revelation, time and eternity, human hope and divine grace. When we hold these two celebrations together, they form a profound spiritual lesson. The New Year gives us the desire for renewal; Deneha provides us with the power for renewal.

Human resolutions fade; divine grace sustains. The New Year awakens longing; Deneha answers that longing with divine revelation. Renewal is not primarily a human achievement; it is participation in Christ's life. Our efforts matter, but they succeed only when they begin in God and end in God. Christ steps into the River Jordan so that our lives may flow into eternal life. Deneha teaches that every moment can become an epiphany—every day can reveal God's presence.

Deneha is the perfect moment to remember our baptism. We are called to renounce sin, reject darkness, and walk as children of light. Let us enter the New Year asking: Am I living my baptismal calling? Let us create intentional spaces for prayer, replace anxieties with trust, distractions with discipline, and resentment with forgiveness.

Conclusion

As we stand at the crossroads of a new year and a new revelation, we are reminded that Christian hope is not optimism; it is rooted in the certainty that God is with us. The God who stepped into the Jordan steps into our struggles. The Light that shone on Christ shines on us. Even when the world feels uncertain, the feast of Deneha assures us that God's love is unchanging. Even when our own strength fades, the New Year reminds us that new beginnings are always possible in Christ.

As we enter a New Year, we are not walking alone. The God who revealed Himself in the Jordan walks before us, behind us, and within us. Amen

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BRIDEGROOM WANTED

Orthodox Christian parents from Kottayam Diocese, now settled in the U.S., invite proposals from parents of God-fearing, well-educated, and professionally settled Orthodox Christian boys for their daughter, born and brought up in the U.A.E., currently pursuing her Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) in the U.S. She is 5'3 and currently 22 years old, kind-hearted and family-oriented. We prefer proposals from men working or studying in the U.S., Canada, or and preferably Gulf countries willing to move to the U.S. The marriage would be conducted sometime after July of 2027.

Contact -

marriage.proposals2003@gmail.com

Are We Bound by Invisible Chains?

EXPLORING DIGITAL CHAINS IN A HYPER-CONNECTED WORLD

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO BEHAVIOURAL ADDICTIONS

Dr. Thomas Gregor Issac

As we enter into another new year, we are again reminded of the timeless verse "Water, water, everywhere but not a drop to drink!!" from the poem "The Rime of The Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. There is a rapidly expanding presence of the latest technology everywhere and we are immersed in all sorts of digital content, but we seldom give any thought on what is truly nourishing, necessary and appropriate. Humankind has accomplished more great things in the last thirty years than ever before, and along with these achievements, new technologies like the internet have been developed which keeps us in constant connect with daily events and with each other. In this era of digital connectivity, we often fail to connect with ourselves or with our loved ones, and sometimes even get entangled in many 'wrong' connections. This article attempts to first examine the challenges posed by behavioural addictions which result in physical, emotional and psychological dilemmas affecting many of us, often with no clear solution in sight, and second to provide viable solutions to address these challenges.

A Story that Mirrors Today's Youth

It is a warm Sunday afternoon after Holy Qurbana. After attending Sunday School classes, a teenage boy named Adarsh (imaginary name) sits alone in a corner of the church courtyard, staring blankly at his phone. His peers and friends think he is simply an introvert or being shy or tired. His parents

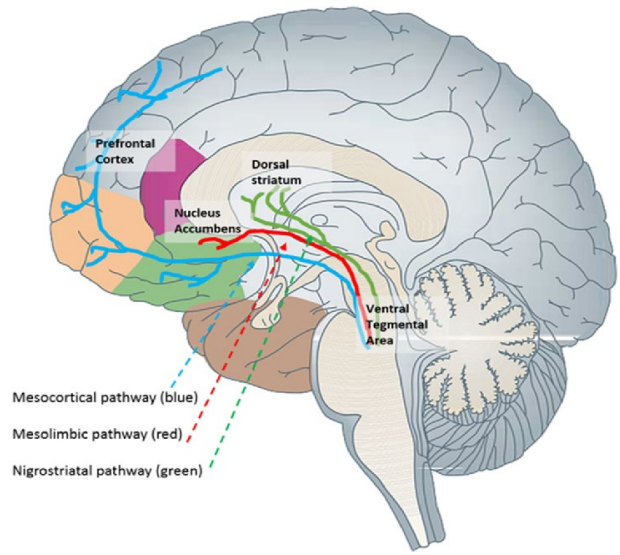
think he is going through "normal teenage mood swings." But deep inside, he feels as though two people live within him. The first is the bright, motivated, compassionate young man who faithfully attends church, sings in the choir, dreams of becoming an engineer, and loves spending time with his cousins during holidays. The second is a shadow-self which is drawn endlessly to online games where he feels powerful, to social media where he compares himself to everyone else, and to pornography that leaves him feeling guilty and spiritually hollow. Every night, the battle intensifies. He tells himself, "I can stop anytime." He promises, "Today I won't watch anything inappropriate." He convinces himself, "Just one game… just one video… just one scroll, then I will stop." But one becomes many. Minutes become hours. Desire becomes dependence, and Dependence becomes invisible chains.

Adarsh is not alone. He represents millions of young people who are intelligent, sincere, well -nurtured and good-hearted, but unfortunately caught in habits that quietly erode their confidence, relationships, physical capacity, mental health, and spiritual strength. Behavioural addictions are not dramatic. They do not cause sudden or immediate collapse. But they corrode the body, mind and soul gradually and almost imperceptibly.

What are Behavioural Addictions?

When people hear the word "addiction," they often think of visible substances such as alcohol, smoking, or drugs like Cannabis, LSD, Cocaine, MDMA and Heroin which are often seen as physical substances that can wreak havoc on the individual using it and his/her family members. The use of these drugs is illegal and often leave visible trails. These substances that have been made increasingly available through illegal routes, corrode the health and well-being of the user and society. However, behavioural addictions are like the 'tip of the iceberg': they leave no visible trails, produce low physical symptoms, yet cause significant psychological harm, resulting in complex behaviours. Yet these substances are not prohibited by legislature to a large extent, making them easily accessible, available and affordable. It has been demonstrated that like the stimulation provided by physical substances, behavioural actions like pornography and excessive screen use also acts via specific brain circuits, especially the Nucleus Accumbens mediated through the prefrontal cortex. This causes a burst of dopamine release which is associated with pleasure, and with repeated use results in hijacking and rewiring of the brain circuits causing impairment in a reward-based behaviour which is easily learnt but difficult to unlearn.

Figure 1 – The Brain Reward pathway (adapted from Carmen Ferrer-Perez et. al. Neurobiology of Addiction, 2024)



Main dopaminergic pathways are depicted in this image. The brain reward system is primarily associated with the mesolimbic (red) and mesocortical (blue) pathways.

These behavioural excesses can now be found across most of the online activities like those mentioned below and explained in detail:

Pornography, Excessive Gaming, Endless Scrolling, Social Media Validation, Compulsive Texting, Binge-Watching of Content, Gambling, Online Gaming and Online Shopping.

Pornography: Unfortunately, given the availability of content via computers, smartphones, and other smart devices, *pornography or digital voyeurism* has grown to be a significant issue in modern times. According to neurological research it produces more dopamine spikes than genuine intimacy. Like cocaine, this can change reward circuits and decrease grey matter in areas of the brain related to motivation and judgment. As a result, it desensitizes the brain, causing a desire for more intense content. Significant psychological repercussions have been found, including elevated anxiety and depression, decreased motivation (also referred to as "porn-induced apathy"), skewed body image and irrational expectations, impaired future marital intimacy, relationship avoidance, and—most importantly—shame cycles ("I hate that I keep doing this"). Long-term porn addiction can also lead to cognitive impairment, including problems with focus and attention, which can significantly impact productivity and work-life balance. Emerging research evidence shows that excessive exposure to porn can lead to compulsive masturbation, dangerous behaviours like engaging in unsafe and unethical sexual practices, delinquent behaviours, excessive anxiety while precipitating guilt and depressive cognitions. These aspects can significantly interfere with optimal functioning of the individual and hamper him/her from realizing their full potential.

Gaming is not bad by itself. Many young people like to play games in social groups, for leisure, or to unwind. However, in order to keep the player interested and captivated, contemporary video games are designed using psychological concepts. To keep players interested and involved, many modern video games are designed especially around violent, adventuristic and sexual themes, which makes them more addictive. This is accomplished through the application of concepts such as variable ratio reinforcement (unpredictable rewards), the creation of artificial goals (levels, points, trophies), the provision of a sense of community through online social belonging, an escape from stress or loneliness, and hyperstimulation that surpasses anything found in real life. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has classified Gaming Disorder as a mental health disorder. We have heard about the self-harming enacting behaviours associated with the dreaded 'Blue Whale' game. The common symptoms often seen associated with gaming disorder are losing track of time, thinking about the game constantly, neglecting studies, family, personal and spiritual life, irritability when stopped, prioritizing gaming over real responsibilities and feeling more confident in the game world than real world. There are studies linking excessive gaming to be associated with Violent behaviour and poor attentional span. This has also been shown to have emotional impact in terms of creating the Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO) on missions or updates, Dependency on virtual friendships, Identity centered around gaming, Difficulty engaging in face-to-face conversations and poor communication patterns along with Increased aggression in some types of games. Very often gaming is seen in association with certain developmental disorders like ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and Conduct Disorder, and may need to be evaluated for treatment by a qualified professional.

Excessive non -purposive smart use or

scrolling also has become another major issue now, irrespective of age. Tech companies often hire neuroscientists, behavioural psychologists, and web designers to create "sticky" behaviours which make using smart phones appealing with newer models issued at regular intervals. It has been found that '**reel** watching' has taken over '**real** watching' and that even the elderly engage in excessive online presence to watch news in social media or engaging videos. The role of 'Influencer' also has obtained a status symbol among peers and everyone wants to create content and upload it irrespective of the nature, necessity or novelty. Excessive screen time can lead to increased anxiety, depression and irritability, difficulty in concentrating, sleep issues, low self-esteem, trauma from cyberbullying, social isolation (despite constant "connection"), and identity confusion because of comparison culture, according to research by the American Psychological Association.

Social Media Validation is another domain which needs to be understood. Instead of real appreciation, very often likes, shares and number of subscribers determine your social status. This also results in developing content which may be widely taken in without any substance or meaning. This therefore leads to a perpetual cycle wherein people relish in suboptimal quality and engage in quantity. Gradually, longer videos are reduced with replacement by shorter videos across the platforms or reels which give moments of satisfaction and spurts of dopamine release in the brain, hijacking the reward pathways, when compared to documentaries or online lectures.

Compulsive texting has also become an important behavioural problem now. People are encouraged to make their online presence felt as well as respond to queries or provide comments for the video content. This results in indulging in compulsive texting often without any inhibition with the pseudo-confidence of digital anonymity. The comments may be often vulgar, critical and slanderous than being supportive or educative.

Binge-watching: An important addictive behaviour is also seen in *binge-watching of shows or series* on various television platforms irrespective of age. Very often content is provided as smaller snippets and viewers are encouraged to binge-watch these episodes usually across the weekends. This instant gratification and information overload has proven to reduce emotional health in terms of neglecting other important activities, encouraging secondary negative behaviours like reducing physical activity, encouraging binge-eating, increasing obesity rates and also worsening anxiety and inducing depressive cognitions. This results in impaired lifestyle choices causing physical, emotional and spiritual harm within self and family.

Gambling is still prevalent across various online platforms though it is made illegal as per law in the country. Many celebrities endorse the same through advertisements which also gives a picture that these are legal and can result in income generation. The online gambling websites rely on human behavioural principles to hijack human behaviour and utilise this vulnerability to encourage this pathological behaviour. Professionals in this field often describe this as the most difficult type of dependent behaviour to treat. Online gambling affects not just intellectual and cognitive faculties but also impairs psychological health and affect financial resources as well. There have been many reports wherein people have engaged in illegal activities to get money for online gambling.

Online gaming refers to any video game that is either played online or that offers an online component allowing players to interact with others in a persistent virtual world. While it can offer a sense of community, its

excessive use, often termed 'Internet Gaming Disorder', wreaks havoc across three primary domains. Physically, the sedentary nature of gaming leads to a 'posture of pain,' causing chronic musculoskeletal issues like 'text neck,' carpal tunnel syndrome, and vision strain, while the blue light from late-night sessions suppresses melatonin, causing debilitating sleep cycles. Mentally, the brain is subjected to a 'dopamine storm,' which over time leads to receptor desensitization. This manifests as anhedonia (the inability to feel joy in normal life), heightened irritability, and a reliance on the game as a maladaptive escape from anxiety and depression. Socially, the gamer often falls into a 'digital silo,' where virtual achievements replace real-world milestones, leading to the erosion of face-to-face communication skills, neglected family duties, and a profound sense of loneliness that persists even when surrounded by thousands of 'online friends.' The digital gamer becomes 'alone in the crowd'.

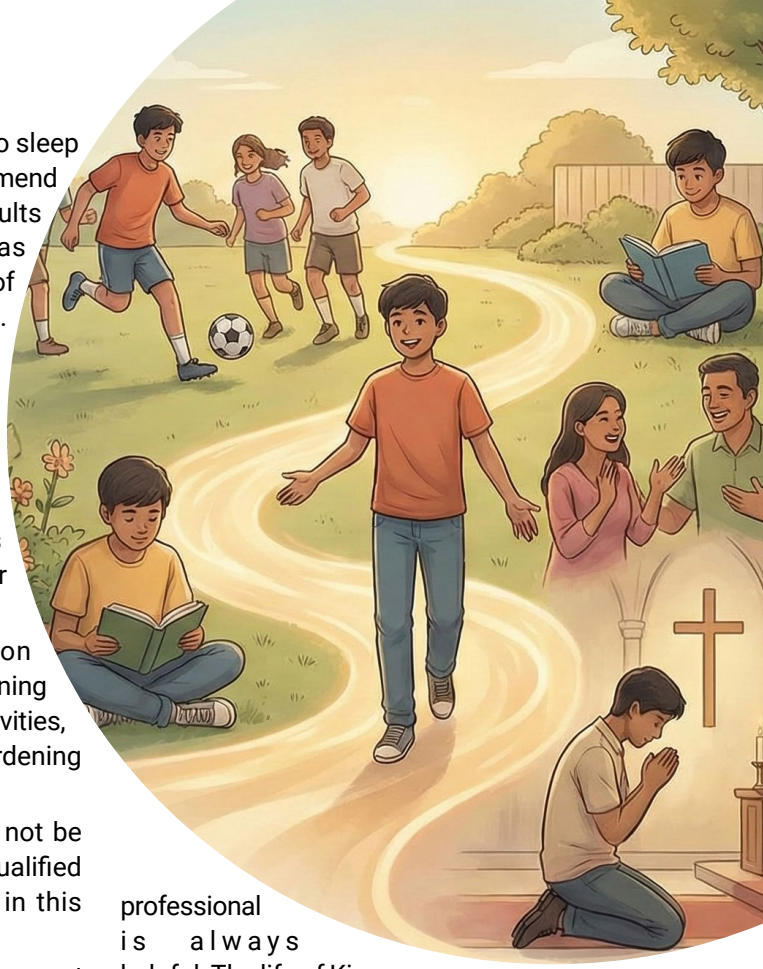
Online shopping is the research, purchase, and delivery of goods or services on the internet, which can be positive in its early stages, as it provides time savings, access to global markets, and enables those with mobility issues to obtain necessities, but when it becomes a behavioural addiction (a clinical diagnosis: Compulsive Buying Disorder), it sets off the destructive cycle of "anticipation and spending." Physically, 24/7 access can result in sedentary habits and exposure to "blue light" from shopping binges late at night, which can disrupt circadian rhythms and result in chronic fatigue; mentally, the brain is wired to seek the "pre-purchase high" of the massive dopamine surge that the search and click provide, followed by the "post-purchase crash" of deep guilt, anxiety, and shame when the item wears off its initial "newness"; and, socially and financially, this addiction is especially corrosive, as it often results in the "fortress of secrecy" in which packages are hidden from family members, credit card debt is accrued in secrecy, and digital acquisition takes precedence over real-world relationships. This can create a materialistic view of life that values things over self-worth, which is at significant odds with the Orthodox call to a life of simplicity and spiritual wealth, especially for our youth who are bombarded by targeted advertisements.

The Spiritual Dimension: Another health dimension which is often overlooked and neglected while succumbing to behavioural addictions is *the spiritual dimension*. The Holy Bible reminds us of how Joseph escaped temptation by fleeing from Potiphar's wife, leaving his cloak behind (Genesis 39:12). Likewise, we need to avoid even the first improper approach or advance by others and flee from these unwanted situations that may lead us into sin. In the New Testament, St. Mathew emphasizes that the eye is the lamp of the body, and that if the eye is healthy, the whole body will be full of light (Mt. 6:22). St. Paul also warns us (2 Timothy 2:22) to flee from youthful passions and pursue righteousness. In the digital age, 'fleeing' means setting physical boundaries, like keeping phones out of the bedroom at night, maintaining digital discipline and engage only on a "need to use" basis.

Viable Solutions to Overcome Behavioural Addictions

Some practical tips to prevent behavioural addictions to affect our lives and functioning include:

Digital discipline - This includes utilizing a dedicated common space at home for browsing. Maintain awareness by asking yourself why you are using the media, how it is going to help you and how long you are going to use it. Very often, observing a digital detox or digital Sabbath - restricting the use for a period of time in a week/day, has been advocated.



Avoid using social media while going to sleep or in bed. Most of the guidelines recommend limiting screen time for teens and adults to not more than two hours daily, as excessive use may increase the risk of physical, mental, and cognitive disorders.

Delay – when there is a craving to use a smart device, 'wait it out', as often the urge goes away by itself.

Deep Breathing and Mindfulness techniques help in reducing the anxiety attached with craving and re-engages the prefrontal cortex for acting on other important tasks.

Distraction- Healthy distraction strategies like engaging in hobbies, learning to play a musical instrument, sports activities, engaging in positive behaviours like gardening or reading can definitely help.

If the difficulty still persists, do not be shy to seek professional help from a qualified professional and spiritual' guidance in this regard.

The Internet is a double-edged sword which can inflict harm on others and on oneself if wielded the wrong way. It is pertinent for us to realize that we are not defined by our temptations, nor our mistakes nor our addictions, but in Christ's unconditional love for us. Hence, we can definitely overcome this temptation by maintaining personal discipline. Governments are also planning policy changes to reduce the impact of behavioural addictions. Recently, Australia has banned the use of social media for teens below 16 years of age.

Always remember that our future is far greater than anything a screen can offer. With proper physical engagements in sports activities, productive hobbies, social connectedness and spiritual faith, behavioural addictions can be managed and largely prevented. Medical and psychological help if needed from qualified professional is always helpful. The life of King David, marked by battles not only within his family but also with lust, greed, hatred, and envy, powerfully speaks of deliverance and freedom through the Psalms. As Psalm 107:14 declares, "God brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their chains in pieces." Let us trust ever more in our Creator to break the invisible chains of behavioural addictions.

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Digital Tools for the Soul: An Orthodox Reflection on Faith, Technology and the Eternal Word

Dr. Helen K. Joy

Introduction: Ancient Faith in a Modern World

In the beginning was the Word and the Word became flesh, not code.

Yet today, the Word may appear before us on a glowing screen. The same hands that once turned the pages of a prayer book now swipe across digital scrolls. The same eyes that gazed upon painted icons now behold their lighted likenesses.

The question is not whether we can use technology but whether it can become a vessel of grace. Can pixels carry prayer? Can algorithms echo wisdom?

Our Malankara Orthodox Church, rooted in the apostolic faith of St. Thomas, has always been a living bridge between the ancient and the modern, the divine and the human. From palm-leaf manuscripts to printed Gospels, from oral hymns to online chants, the Church has embraced tools while guarding the truth.

Today, we stand at another threshold — called to use digital tools for the soul, not to replace holiness, but to deepen it.

The Purpose of Technology in the Life of Faith

Every tool is a gift, but also a test. Technology, like language or art, becomes holy when it serves the purpose of communion — communion with God and with one another. When used with discernment, the smartphone can become a prayer book, the computer a library of patristic wisdom, and the internet a fellowship of believers. As St. Paul reminds us: "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Our forefathers used styluses to inscribe Scripture; we now use styluses on screens. The act is the same — what changes is the intention. When our heart is pure, even our digital tools become liturgical instruments.

Learning the Scriptures with Digital Help

The Word of God has traveled through many forms — from stone to scroll, from

manuscript to printed Bible, and now to mobile app.

Orthodox believers today have countless digital aids: Bible apps that offer daily readings from the lectionary; AI-based tools that help us understand original Greek or Syriac meanings; and Audio Bibles that bring the Word to life during our journeys.

Yet, even as technology assists our study, we must remember - Scripture is not merely information to be consumed, but revelation to be received. Technology can explain a parable, but only the Holy Spirit can reveal its power.

A Bible app can remind us to read, but only prayer can help us hear.

Let us, therefore, use technology not to master the Word — but to let the Word master us.

Digital Gateways to the Church Fathers

For centuries, the writings of the Church Fathers were locked in libraries and monasteries. Today, the words of St. Basil, St. Ephrem, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Gregorios of Parumala are just a click away. Websites, podcasts, and digital libraries — even the Philokalia online — allow believers to explore the treasures of Orthodox thought from anywhere in the world. But the internet's abundance can tempt us to superficiality. We may collect quotes but forget to live them; we may study doctrines but neglect humility. The Fathers remind us that wisdom is never divorced from repentance. So, as we browse through their words, let us do so in a spirit of silence and awe, remembering that theology is not learned from screens, but from knees bent in prayer.

Prayer and Worship in the Digital Age

When the pandemic closed church doors, many of us experienced liturgy through livestreams. Though it offered comfort, we also felt the ache — the longing to stand before the altar, to smell the incense, to receive the Holy Qurbana. Technology may help us attend, but only the Church's sacramental life allows us to partake. Online worship can inspire faith, but it cannot replace the Eucharist — the mystery where Heaven and Earth truly meet.

Still, technology can support our life of prayer - Apps can remind us of prayer hours; Digital icons may guide meditation, and Online fellowship will help in strengthening isolated believers.

The call is not to reject technology, but to baptize it — to use it with reverence, as one would handle the censer or the cross.

The Temptations of the Digital World

The screen can enlighten, but it can also enslave. What was meant to serve the mind can slowly master the heart. The glow that once illuminated can begin to blind. With each endless scroll, the soul grows more restless; with each new voice online, the still small voice within grows fainter. We consume without tasting, speak without listening, and connect without communion. St. Peter warns us: "Be sober, be watchful" (1 Peter 5:8). The danger of our age is not persecution by sword, but distraction by abundance — a thousand flashing images that keep us from seeing the one true Light. The evil one no longer whispers in gardens or deserts; he hides in notifications, tempting us not to sin outright, but to drift — gently, endlessly, away from awareness of God.

The early monks fled into the wilderness to find silence, to wrestle with demons of thought and desire. Today, we must find our own deserts — not of sand and solitude, but of intentional silence amid the digital storm. To close the laptop can be a form of prayer. To silence the phone can be an act of resistance. To pause before posting can be a moment of repentance. Practice digital fasting — sacred

pauses in your day when the heart is free from the tyranny of the screen. Step into stillness, not as escape, but as encounter. In that space of quiet, the Spirit still speaks. Silence is still the language of God, and when we reclaim our attention, we reclaim our soul. For what we gaze upon, we become. And if our eyes return to the Light, then even in this glowing age, our hearts will not grow dim.

Redeeming Technology: Making It Holy

The holy fathers sanctified time through prayer. We can sanctify technology through intention.

Imagine your phone as a portable prayer corner - The wallpaper as an icon of Christ or anything positive; a reminder set for evening prayer; and a note app filled with intercessions and thanksgiving.

Use technology as a servant, not as a master. Let it remain beneath your will, not above your heart. Tools were made to serve truth, not to shape it, and never to replace it. The danger is not in the machine, but in the surrender of our discernment to its rhythm. Let your social media posts become words of blessing, brief icons of light in a crowded marketplace of noise. Let your searches be pilgrimages for wisdom, not wanderings through vanity. Let your messages carry kindness, short missives of mercy in a world that scrolls too fast to notice love.

The Apostle Paul once walked the roads of Rome, turning the empire's highways into paths of grace. Today, we tread the digital highways, carrying the same Gospel across invisible networks and unseen borders. The world is still one great mission field; only the routes have changed. When technology is used with discernment and humility, it ceases to be a distraction and becomes a discipline. The screen becomes a window, not a wall. The click becomes a prayer. The post becomes a proclamation. In this way, even our devices can join the song of creation, glorifying God in their own silent way. For in Christ, all things, even code and circuitry, can be gathered and transfigured. When the heart is consecrated, the hand that types becomes priestly, and every act online can become a liturgy of light.

Conclusion: The Living Word Beyond the Screen

Christ is not an image we scroll past. He is the Image in whom we are made — the living Icon that gives meaning to all others. No code can contain His glory; no software can express His love. His presence cannot be downloaded, yet it can be revealed in every act of love, every word of truth, every gesture of mercy we share.

When our hearts are filled with Him, even the screen — that mirror of modern life — can begin to reflect His light. The goal is not to flee from technology, but to transfigure it: to make it serve the soul instead of seducing it, to let it become a servant of the Spirit rather than a master of our minds.

"Let our devices remind us of devotion, not distraction. Let our screens shine with prayer, not pride. Let every online act become a whisper of grace in the digital wind."

For the Word who became flesh still dwells among us — not bound to a temple, nor confined to a page, but moving through every age, every tool, and every tongue. From the voice in the burning bush to the voice across a broadband line, His message remains unchanged: "Be still, and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10)

In that stillness, even the hum of machines can become the hush of worship. The glowing screen before us can , in an instant, turn into a small and shining icon of His eternal light.

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LET THE CROSS WALK AHEAD

The Expanding Mission Imagination of Pathros Mar Osthathios

Fr. Dr. John Mathew

Introduction

Who are the "Joy and Crown of Malankara"? For Pathros Mar Osthathios, this title did not belong to the already established faithful. He believed that it referred to those who had been newly received into the Church, and that their very presence revealed the heart of the Orthodox mission. This self-understanding was pastoral, ascetical, and deeply evangelical in nature. His travel diaries, letters, and contributions to ecclesial debates do not present one fixed method of mission. Instead, they reveal an expanding vision in which caste, worship, migration, and social responsibility are continually reinterpreted as places for Christian witness. Through introspection with the legacy of St. Gregorios of Parumala and the reforming witness of St. Geevarghese Mar Dionysius, Mar Osthathios appears in a new light. He is not simply an administrator or an itinerant preacher, but something much more. He emerges as a theological critic of inherited structures. He also stands out as a pioneer of a distinctly Indian Orthodox understanding of mission. All this took place during a period of significant change within the Church and in a newly independent India, when the Malankara community was also striving to combine evangelisation, social justice, and ecclesial identity in modern India.

Mission, Caste, and Ecclesial Belonging

The history of caste segregation within ecclesial life helps us understand the early missionary approach of St. Gregorios of Parumala. His initiatives among socially excluded communities created space for a later and more direct challenge to caste boundaries by the young Deacon Pathros, who became Pathros Mar Osthathios. This movement shows a transition from pragmatic adaptation

to explicit theological protest. In the nineteenth century, separate chapels were accepted as socially unavoidable. They allowed worship for those who were excluded by the dominant caste practices. The intention was missionary, even though the method reflected social limitations.

St. Gregorios opened the way by reaching communities that lived beyond caste acceptance. He worked within the constraints of his time, believing that separate structures made access possible. His aim was broader than the form it took. Pathros Mar Osthathios later questioned these arrangements. He taught that baptism makes all believers co-heirs in Christ (Gal 3:26–28). For him, caste could no longer define who belongs in the Church. His striking call to "burn Pulappallikal" or churches that underscored caste hierarchy, expressed a theological concern rather than a social outburst. He believed that Christian witness must be visible through genuine equality. In Christ, dividing walls are broken (Eph 2:14). Unity in the Body is the true mark of identity.

From this perspective, evangelisation without ecclesial equality is incomplete. St. Gregorios opened the missionary path beyond caste. Pathros Mar Osthathios called the Church itself to embody that calling through a renewed sense of baptismal belonging. He emerges as a theological critic of inherited structures. He also stands out as a pioneer of a distinctly Indian Orthodox understanding of mission. All this unfolded during a period of significant change within the Church and in a newly independent India, at a time when the Malankara community was also struggling to integrate evangelisation, social justice, and ecclesial identity in modern India.

Liturgical Translation, Authority, and Participation

Liturgical translation becomes a revealing case through which we can evaluate Pathros Mar Osthathios's wider strategy of Orthodox witness. The Malayalam translation of the Thaksa suggests that a credible witness requires a dynamic interplay between authority, tradition, and participation. St. Geevarghese Mar Dionysius is recognised as the most farsighted architect of a genuinely autocephalous ecclesial identity for the Malankara Orthodox Church. He was a biblical and liturgical scholar of remarkable depth. He was also a courageous spiritual leader who resisted colonial interventions as the Malankara Metropolitan. Mar Dionysius did not oppose translation. But he cautioned that every liturgical reform must be grounded in conciliar authority and competent Syriac scholarship. He emphasised that the integrity of tradition must never be compromised by immediate pressures.

Pathros Mar Osthathios believed that the very question of who is competent to guide translation forms part of ecclesial witnessing. He indicates this when he reflects on the prohibition of selling the book Christianity. He remarks that "we have not read the philosophical or historical books of others. We have no knowledge of them, nor the learning required to read them and understand them." For him, this was a principle. Decisions must be undertaken only after consulting those who are truly competent. In moments of reform, the Church must therefore "choose bishops capable of handling such matters." From this perspective, he gently questioned whether firm judgments should be made without adequate understanding, irrespective of one's position.

Writers such as M. P. Varkey and the young Deacon M. P. Pathros argued that an unintelligible Syriac language inevitably reduces the faithful to passive observers. They held that this situation continues certain social distinctions within worship. They also insisted that witnessing in the Church is not limited to social outreach. It includes ensuring spiritual

accessibility within the Eucharistic celebration itself. Deacon Pathros observed that the "righteous of God are prevented from entering the Church" if the liturgy remains intelligible only to a few. Later, M. Kurian Thomas clarified that the intention was not to abandon the Syriac language. The purpose was to make worship spiritually intelligible. He emphasised that this conviction aligns with Deacon Pathros's broader program of welcoming the faithful as coparticipants rather than spectators. Seen from this angle, vernacularisation was not simply a linguistic reform. It was part of a wider ecclesial transformation of belonging. It suggests that Orthodox witnessing requires worship itself to embody the unity and participation of the one Body of Christ.

A Portrait of the Sleeba Dasa: Evangelisation as Cross Bearing

A significant dimension of Pathros Mar Osthathios's witnessing strategy appears in the Sleeba Dasa, the Servants of the Cross. The Servants of the Cross form a lay order founded not on clerical status but on spiritual simplicity and solidarity with the poor. It was designed to support marginalised communities. Its goal is to train believers who can preach in local languages, live simply, practise Scripture-centred devotion, and serve without financial burdens.

This lay order was shaped by his symbolic language of "Carmel," where contemplative renewal follows labour undertaken for the Cross. Pathros Mar Osthathios frequently referred to those newly received into the Church as the "joy and crown of Malankara," and he urged that the silver and gold stored in parishes be redirected to those in need. His own decision to turn a personal gift of a car into a fund for widows expressed his conviction that the episcopal office should be accompanied by simplicity. Although later ecclesial priorities slowed the movement, its impulse for cross-bearing evangelisation remained significant. It became a foundation for his later understanding of Indian Orthodox witnessing as service, humility, and identification with the poor.

Travel Narratives, Pastoral Presence, and Social Critique

Mar Osthathios's travel writings, especially those from post-1958 Malabar, reveal a mission strategy rooted not in institutional expansion but in compassionate presence among migrant and socially vulnerable communities. These writings combine pastoral care with social awareness. The questions of land, labour, and unstable parish life are presented not as sociological curiosities but as theological arenas where the Church must witness through solidarity. The travel narratives form a pastoral theology of his journey among the congregations of the Malabar region. They question complacency about wealth, ceremonial display, and the neglect of the poor. Encounters with Bishop Walsh and other ecumenical partners further broaden the horizon. They demonstrate that Orthodox witnessing in India was already part of a broader Christian concern for education, social uplift, and the training of local leadership.

Towards an Indian Witnessing Horizon

Pathros Mar Osthathios's mission strategy unfolds gradually. It begins among socially marginalised communities in Kerala. It then extends to migrant Christian families in Wayanad. It finally reaches outward toward India as a whole. This widening horizon is most clearly evident in the missionary journeys and reflections preserved in The Lost Sheep (MOC Publications, Kottayam). The text gives special attention to both journeys.

The first journey commenced on July 1, 1949. He explains that its purpose was to care for the spiritual needs of Malankara people who

were scattered across India for work, education, and business. He also wished to awaken the Church to its missionary duty in the context of India's freedom struggle. He notes that several national Christian thinkers had reflected on Christian service to the nation. They include K S George, K T Paul, and C F Andrews. Within Malankara, however, it was almost only Mar Osthathios who asked how this ancient Church might share in the building of a new India.

His third aim was to introduce both Christians and non-Christians to the apostolic heritage of Malankara and to present its spiritual treasures beyond Kerala. For this reason, he understood the establishment of churches such as the Bombay church not as internal expansion. He viewed them as missionary bases. He also regretted that many families had joined the CMS because the Church had been inattentive in regions such as Visakhapatnam and Poona. He believed that unmarried clergy could leave secure teaching posts in Kerala and serve in North India, and would never regret such a decision. These reflections raise enduring questions about whether today's clergy prioritise comfort and position over mission.

In this way, The Lost Sheep records not only his travels but also his conviction that migration, dispersion, and regional diversity are providential openings for witness. The volume, therefore, provides essential documentation for understanding his wider goal of imagining Malankara as an Indian Church oriented towards a national mission horizon.

In conclusion, a distinctly Indian portrait emerges in this vision of mission. He appears as a metropolitan whose ascetic simplicity energised ecclesial reform. His love for tradition required a liturgy that the people could genuinely understand and appreciate. His critique of caste and ecclesial wealth exposed deeper contradictions in Christian

life. Through him, Orthodox mission becomes Orthodox witnessing, expressed not in institutional triumph but in joyful solidarity with the marginalised. It becomes deep reverence for the Cross and a readiness to translate the Gospel and the liturgy into the diverse cultural rhythms of India. His legacy continues to inspire the Malankara Church to understand witnessing as a continuous process of ecclesial renewal, supporting the weak, embracing the excluded, dismantling caste, and confidently proclaiming Christ within the changing contexts of contemporary India.`

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IS CHRIST
A SECTARIAN GOD?

Prof. Dr. Philipose Joshua

Introduction

A few years ago, the Trivandrum Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Church officially started a Jail Ministry in all the eight jails in the district, with a team of volunteers assigned to make a monthly visit to each of the jails, for conducting Bible study and prayer. I was the co-ordinator of the ministry and was also part of the team that visited the Women's Jail. The inmates included convicts as well as undertrials. Though all the inmates did not attend the meeting, there were quite a few who were interested. They were a mixed group coming from different religious backgrounds.

As with other teams, our team also consisted of a priest and few lay people. We took turns in leading the Bible study or giving a sermon. One day it was the turn of a lady to take the class. During her talk she mentioned about praying to Jesus. Suddenly she paused as if she had said something wrong and then continued to say that she mentioned the name of Jesus only because we are Christians, and each of them could pray to one's own God.

I have come across many people, including Christians, who believe that Christ is a sectarian God applicable only to Christians. How does the Bible present Christ – as a sectarian God or the Saviour of the whole world?

How does the Bible present Jesus?

The Bible is very specific in claiming that Christ is not a sectarian God, a God applicable only to Christians. On the other hand, it presents Christ as the saviour of the whole world. The mission and sacrifice of Jesus is very clearly stated in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments, and is the foundational tenet of Christian faith. John 3:16 (NIV) states: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life". It does not say God so loved the Christians. God loved the whole world. 1 John 2:2 (NIV) says: "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." It does not say Jesus died only for the Christians. In Gen 22:18 (NIV), the verse states: "and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me". This promise was made by God to Abraham after he demonstrated his obedience by being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac. This has been fulfilled in Jesus's command to preach the gospel to all the world (Mark 16:15).

Christ, the Saviour of the whole world

It is God's desire that all men be saved as we find in I Tim 2:3-4 (NIV) "This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth". God does not distinguish between different groups of people whether they are Jews or Greeks or any other. In Gal 3:28 (NIV) we

read "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Romans 10:12 (NIV) says, "For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him". The verse highlights the universal nature of God's lordship, stating that he is the lord over all people, regardless of their background. It also emphasizes that God "richly blesses all who call on him," meaning salvation and blessings are available to everyone who calls on him. Many Christians miss this uniqueness of Jesus. The Bible presents Jesus as "the only way". John 14:6 (NIV) says "Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me".

The biblical view sees sectarianism as contrary to the inclusive nature of the Gospel, which is for all people. Jesus is depicted as the Creator and Saviour of the universe, offering salvation to anyone who believes. The Bible presents a strong case against the idea that Christ is a sectarian God exclusively for Christians, instead portraying His work and nature as universal in scope. Key biblical themes emphasize that Jesus' message and salvation are intended for all humanity.

Christ Condemns Sectarianism

Jesus explicitly discouraged sectarian attitudes. When his disciples tried to stop a man from casting out demons because "he does not follow with us," Jesus told them, "Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is for us" (Luke 9:49-50). This indicates that God's work extends beyond the boundaries of any single human-defined group. The Apostle Paul further condemned sectarianism (factions/ divisions) within the early church, stating that such attitudes are signs of spiritual immaturity and are contrary to the unity found in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:11-13; Galatians 5:19-21).

A Universal Purpose and Offer of Salvation

The Bible consistently highlights the universal scope of Christ's mission, which is for all nations and all people:

The only Mediator for all: 1 Timothy 2:5 declares, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus". This position as the sole mediator makes Him accessible to all people seeking God.

Command to all nations: Before ascending to heaven, Jesus commanded His followers to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), clearly indicating that His message was not limited to one sect or ethnicity.

Conclusion

Christianity teaches a monotheistic concept of God, who is the eternal and supreme being, the Creator of all things. The Bible describes God as loving all human beings and wanting all to come to salvation. Christ's divine nature means He is above human divisions, and His existence is timeless and sovereign over all creation. The idea that God belongs to one group is contrary to the biblical portrayal of His universal power and love.

In summary, the biblical narrative refutes the statement that Christ is a sectarian God; instead, it presents Him as a universal Saviour who welcomes all who come to Him in faith, regardless of background or affiliation.

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EMOTIONAL AVAILABILITY

Mrs. Binisha Elza Joseph

As a psychologist, I would like to bring you into a powerful scenario - a conversation not just between a professional psychologist and a child, but between a psychologist and a child's heart. In today's fast-paced world, parents tirelessly juggle multiple responsibilities, striving to provide the best for their children. Despite all efforts to meet physical needs – like school fees, healthy food, and extracurricular activities, something vital often goes unnoticed: 'emotional availability'.

Children may have all their material needs met, yet they quietly yearn for emotional connection, closeness, and validation. Emotional availability isn't about perfection; it's about presence - being truly there in moments that matter the most. But what happens when emotional availability is missing? What does emotional unavailability feel like to a child?

This article invites you on a journey to explore these questions through a conversation, that reveals the silent gaps where love tries to speak but often goes unheard. By understanding what children really need emotionally, parents can learn simple yet transformative ways to close these gaps and build stronger, more loving connections.

Let's step into the child's world and discover how emotional presence becomes the greatest gift we can offer - a gift that no distractions or hardships can replace.

The Silent Gap: When Love Doesn't Speak Loud Enough

A Short Interview with a Child's Heart

Psychologist: Many parents today are doing everything - school fees, classes, healthy food but something seems to be missing. What is it?

Child's Heart: It's when I talk, and you nod while scrolling. When I cry, and you say, "You're fine."

Psychologist: So, if I correctly understand, is it how emotional unavailability feel like for a child?

Child's Heart: Yes. You love me - but I feel alone.

What Parents Say vs. What a Child Feels: Bridging the Emotional Gap

Parents often speak from a place of love and responsibility, but children may hear a different message beneath the words. Here's

how common phrases can be experienced by a child:

What Parents Say	What a Child Feels
"I give you everything"	"But you're not really present with me."
"Be strong"	"I can't show my pain or vulnerability."
"I am doing this for your future"	"I need your love and support right now."

This emotional gap is often unintentional, yet it shapes how children perceive love and connection. Understanding this can help parents adjust their words and actions to meet their child's emotional needs better.

Why Does This Happen?

Psychologist: Why does emotional unavailability happen despite all the efforts parents make?

Child's Heart: Maybe no one showed them how to connect emotionally. Maybe life moves too fast with too many responsibilities. Parents delay connection, thinking time heals, But I keep waiting.

How It Affects Me the Child

- I learn to hide emotions to avoid being a burden.
- I crave approval but feel I can never fully earn it.
- I grow up "mature" but lonely inside.
- Small Changes, Big Difference
- Modern parenting can be overwhelming, but transforming emotional availability starts with simple, realistic steps fit into your life.
- Prioritize Self-Care: Caring for your own emotional and physical well-being is essential. When you are balanced, you have more to emotionally give your child.
- Make Quality Time Sacred: Share meaningful moments like dinner together without distractions. Attend their extracurricular activities with genuine interest. These small acts say, "I am here for you."
- Pause & Listen: Put down your phone, turn off distractions, and truly listen to your children when they speak.
- Validate Feelings: Instead of rushing to fix things, say, "That sounds really hard." Validation helps children feel understood and safe.
- Ask Open-ended Questions: Invite sharing with questions like, "What made you smile today?" or "Was there anything that worried you?"
- Be Real and Vulnerable: Share your own feelings appropriately. This teaches children that emotions are normal and safe to express.
- Create Small Moments of Undivided Presence: Even five uninterrupted minutes of play, cuddling, or conversation create emotional safety and connection.

Final Thoughts

Psychologist: Any last words for parents wanting to bridge this silent gap?

Child's Heart: I don't need a perfect parent. Just a present one... Your attention is my safe place in a world full of distractions... Your emotional presence is the strongest way to say, "I love you."

In a world full of distractions, your emotional presence is the loudest way to say, "I love you".

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(Mrs. Binisha Elza Joseph, consultant psychologist with a Master's degree in Psychology and four years of experience in supporting the student community, has worked as an educator for 3 years and currently serves as a counselling psychologist helping adolescents to thrive emotionally and academically. Binisha is committed to bridging practical psychology with everyday parenting, and empowering families to nurture genuine emotional connections. Binisha belongs to Jerusalem St. Mary's Orthodox Church, Vakathanam, Kottayam)

The Silent Gap

A Short Interview with a Child's Heart

Many parents today are doing everything-school fees, classes, healthy food-but my child says still something seems to be missing. What does emotional unavailability feel like for a child?

It's when I talk, and you nod while scrolling

When I cry, and you tell me is, "Don't worry, you will be fine."

I understand you love me, but I feel alone.

What child Hear v/s What child Feels

What parents say	What a child may feel
"I give you everything".	"But not your undivided attention."
"I am doing this for your future".	"But I need you now in my present".
"Don't cry, be strong!"	"Am I not allowed to show my pain, even though I am strong?"

How It Affects child

- I hide emotions
- I crave approval.
- I grow up "mature" but lonely.

Sometimes parents are not emotionally available, WHY?

- Maybe no one showed a parent how to connect emotionally.
- Maybe life's moving fast with too many things.
- Parents delay connection, thinking time heals, but the child keeps waiting.

Ways to build emotional availability

Small Changes, Big Difference

- Pause & Listen
- Validate Feelings
- Ask Better Questions
- Be Real
- Offer Small Moments of Presence

Final thoughts?

I don't need a PERFECT PARENT. Just a PRESENT ONE.

Your attention is my safe place!

In a world full of distractions, your emotional presence is the loudest way to say, "I love you".

I Do Not Die, I Am Reborn

Dr. Susan Eapen

(Dr. Mrs. Susan Eapen is a globally reputed plant biology and botany scientist and one of the pioneers in transgenic plant research. She retired as a Senior Scientist from Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Mumbai, and currently serves as an Adjunct Professor at UC College. Dr. Eapen belongs to St. Thomas Orthodox Church, UC College, Alwaye.)

I do not die — I drift beyond the veil,
A journey endless, neither frail nor vain.
My atoms sing a universal tale,
Born in the heart of stars, in light and flame.

Hydrogen first stirred when time began,
Thirteen billion years have passed since cosmic birth,
The echo of that primal surge still spans
The vast, unyielding fabric of the Earth.

Carbon, forged in ancient stellar cores,
Iron born in supernova's final cry,
Dispersed across the dark, eternal shores,
They form the dust from which all life will fly.

DNA, a code of wondrous art,
Twists, double helix, thread of life, and mind,
Each nucleotide is a vital part,
Of memories, of purpose, intertwined.

Molecules assemble, cell by cell,
Tissues form, organs pulse in silent grace.
An orchestra of atoms, none can tell
Where one begins, where ends the endless space.

Am I Prime Minister or a simple seed?
A beggar, a child, a doctor, or the air?
Each role I play fulfils the universe's need,
A transient mask I willingly wear.

These atoms—borrowed, ancient, endlessly—
Flow through microbes, plants, and human veins.
They knew the stars, the ocean, every tree,
And in their path, no true death remains.

When I dissolve, my body yields to dust,
Yet atoms do not vanish, nor expire.
They drift anew—renewed by cosmic trust,
Recycled in the universe's choir.

Perhaps reborn in chlorophyll's green breath,
Or woven into silicon's silent frame,
A star's new pulse, escaping cosmic death,
A microbe's spark, a quantum's hidden name.

I do not die —
I am the atom, the wave, the star, the seed,
Forever part of all that was, is, and will be.
I am reborn,
An infinite thread in the Universe's need.

NEWS

Celebration of the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea

The Council of Nicaea is the spiritual foundation of the Christian faith, said His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, Catholicos and Head of the Malankara Church. He stated that the 1700th anniversary of the Council is a reminder of the unity of the Christian Churches. While preserving diverse liturgical traditions, Christians must be able to agree and unite by professing our faith as expressed in the Nicene Creed. His Holiness also said that being able to pray together with the heads of other Churches at the very place where the Council was held in A.D. 325 was something he considered a divine calling. His Holiness was speaking at the inaugural session of the celebrations marking the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, organized under the leadership of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church at the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam.

The meeting was presided over by His Grace. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Chrysostomos Metropolitan, Secretary of the Holy Episcopal Synod. Association Secretary Adv. Biju Oomen delivered the welcome address, and His Grace Dr. Yuhanon Mar Dioscoros Metropolitan presented the theme. His Grace Dr. Joseph Mar Barnabas, Suffragan Metropolitan of the Malankara Mar Thoma Church, and His Grace Geevarghese Mar Aphrem, Auxiliary Bishop of the Kottayam Archdiocese of the Knanaya Catholic Church, delivered benedictory addresses. Dr. Joseph Mar Barnabas, Suffragan Metropolitan, said that the relevance of the Nicene Creed lies in the fact that it continues to shine with undiminished brilliance even after many centuries. Bishop Geevarghese Mar Aprem said it was a matter of pride that His Holiness the Catholicos had participated in the 1700th anniversary celebrations at Iznik along with leaders of Christian churches worldwide and had prayed together with them. His Grace Dr. Mathews Mar Timotheos Metropolitan, Vice President of the Kottayam Theological Seminary, and Rev. Fr. Dr. Thomas Varghese Amayil, Priest Trustee, extended greetings. Rev. Fr. Dr. John Thomas Karingattil, Principal of the Kottayam Theological Seminary, proposed the vote of thanks.

Earlier in the day, Fr. Dr. Ninan K. George, Bursar of the Kottayam Theological Seminary, inaugurated the Theological Seminar and welcomed the gathering. Rev. Fr. Dr. Thomas Kuzhippil (Professor, Oriental Institute, Vadavathoor), His Grace Dr. Yuhanon Mar Demetrios Metropolitan (Metropolitan of the Delhi Diocese), Rev. Fr. Dr. Jacob Kurien (former Principal, Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam), and Rev. Fr. Dr. Jossi Jacob (Principal, Orthodox Theological Seminary, Nagpur) presented papers on various topics. Rev. Fr. Dr. Ninan K. George, Rev. Fr. Dr. Jacob Mathew. Rev. Fr. Dr. Bijesh Philip and Rev. Fr. K. V. Elias moderated the sessions. His Graces- Dr. Yuhanon Mar Polycarpos, Abraham Mar Epiphaniyos, Dr. Yuhanon Mar Theodoros, and

Dr. Joshua Mar Nicodemos Metropolitans—had also participated in the seminar. Members of the Church Working Committee and Managing Committee, as well as representatives of various organizations, participated in the program. Rev. Fr. Jobin Varghese, manager of the Old Seminary, offered the vote of thanks.

Books authored by Rev. Fr. Dr. Bijesh Philip (Redemptive Remembrance: Orthodox Christian Teachings An Introduction) and Rev. Fr. Dr. Varghese P. Varghese (Mamlo b'Suryoyo: A New Milestone in Spoken Syriac) were released by His Holiness the Catholicos

33rd International Theological Commission of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches

The 33rd International Theological Commission meeting of the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church was held at Kottayam. The two-day meeting was hosted by the Malankara Church at the Devalokam Catholicate Palace, the headquarters of the Malankara Church.

Fr. Hyacinthe Destivelle, delegate from the Vatican; Archbishop Mar Mathew Moolakkatt of the Archdiocese of Kottayam; Archbishop Thomas Mar Koorilos, Metropolitan of the Malankara Catholic Archdiocese of Thiruvalla; Bishop Mar Joseph Kallarangatt, Diocese of Pala; Bishop Selvister Ponnumuthan, Latin Diocese of Punalur; Fr. Dr. Augustine Kadayapparambil; Fr. Dr. Philip Nelpurapparambil; and Fr. Dr. Jacob Thekkeparambil represented the Catholic Church.

The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church was represented by His Grace. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Chrysostomos Metropolitan, Secretary of the Holy Episcopal Synod; Dr. Yuhanon Mar Demetrios Metropolitan; Dr. Joseph Mar Dionysius Metropolitan; Dr. Geevarghese Mar Barnabas Metropolitan; Fr. Dr. Jose John, Fr. Dr. Mathew Varghese, and Fr. Dr. Koshy Vaidyan.

Members of the Theological Commission also met with the Malankara Metropolitan and Catholicos, His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III. As part of the 1,700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed, the theological dimensions of the creed were also discussed during the meeting. The Commission also paid homage to the late Pope Francis and extended greetings to the newly elected head of the global Catholic Church, Pope Leo XIV.

1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea at Nicaea (Iznik) in Turkey

World Christian leaders met in Turkey to mark the 1700th anniversary of the Nicaean Council. At the invitation of His Holiness the Patriarch of Constantinople, His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church arrived in Nicaea. His Holiness Catholicos Bava led the Mass along with Pope Leo XIV and the Patriarchs. The 1700th anniversary was held in the ancient city, where the first Ecumenical Synod took place in 325.

The Metropolitan of the UK-Europe-Africa, H. G. Abraham Mar Stephanos; the member of the Working Committee of the Church and ecumenical relations advisor to His Holiness Mr. Jacob Mathew; the Secretary of the Department of Ecumenical Relations of the Church, Rev. Fr. Ashwin Fernandes; and the Secretary of His Holiness, Fr. Baiju Johnson, represented the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

Commemorative Meeting in Honour of His Holiness Baselios Augen I Catholicos

A commemorative meeting- Smrithi Sandhya- marking the Golden Jubilee of the demise of His Holiness Baselios Augen I, the fourth Catholicos and the 17th Malankara Metropolitan of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, was held at the Church headquarters, Devalokam, Kottayam. Inaugurating the meeting, His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, recalled that HH Augen I Bava, of blessed memory, was a supreme ascetic who made humility, compassion, and care the guiding principles of his life.

As a renowned Syriac scholar, the contributions of Augen Bava to the liturgical traditions of the Church are invaluable, said the Catholicos. His deep passion for approaching the Syriac language at its very source and internalizing it profoundly lent exceptional beauty to his writings. During the time of great challenges, Augen Bava stood as a vigilant guardian who preserved the Mar Thoman heritage like an ever-burning lamp, he added.

The Archbishop of the Changanacherry Archdiocese, His Grace Mar Thomas Tharayil, delivered the memorial address. He recalled that His Holiness Augen Bava was the great teacher who handed over the Syriac linguistic heritage to the next generation. He also noted that Augen Bava was a monk who embodied the Indian spiritual ethos in his life and practice.

Scholarly papers were presented on the following themes: "The Syriac Intellectual Tradition in Malankara: Contributions of His Holiness Augen Bava to the Liturgical Order" by Malankara Malpan Rev. Fr. Dr. Johns Abraham Konat, Reesh Cor-Episcopa; "The Literary Beauty and the Ascetic Vision reflected in the Writings of His Holiness Augen Bava" by Rev. Fr. Dr. Jacob Kurien; "The Contributions of His Holiness Augen Bava to the Syriac Linguistic Traditions of Malankara" by Rev. Fr. Dr. Baby Varghese; and "His Holiness Augen Bava as the Light of the MarThoman Heritage on the Throne of the Catholicate" by Rev. Fr. Dr. M. O. John.

Lay Trustee of the Church, Mr. Ronnie Varghese, addressed the gathering during the remembrance session. Metropolitans present included Episcopal Synod Secretary His Grace Dr. Yuhanon Mar Chrysostomos; Their Graces Dr. Yakob Mar Irenaios, Yuhanon Mar Polycarpos, Mathews Mar Theodosius, Dr. Yuhanon Mar Dioscoros, Dr. Joshua Mar Nicodemos, and Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios. Members of the Church Working Committee and Managing Committee, representatives of various Church organizations, clergy, seminary students, and numerous faithful also attended the event.

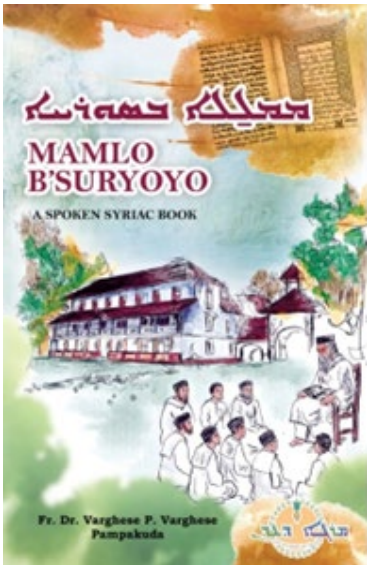
Very Rev. Fr. Yakob Thomas Ramban, Manager of Devalokam Palace, proposed the vote of thanks.

Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios Appointed Assistant Metropolitan of Thiruvananthapuram Diocese

His Holiness Baselios Mar Thoma Mathews III, Catholicos of the Church, appointed Metropolitan H.G. Geevarghese Mar Yulios as the Assistant Metropolitan of the Diocese of Thiruvananthapuram. The appointment was made following the retirement of Metropolitan H.G. Dr. Gabriel Mar Gregorios. Currently HG Mar Yulios is also serving as the Metropolitan

of the Kunnamkulam Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Church. He is also serving as the President of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), Chairperson of the Henry Martin Institute in Hyderabad, President of the Orthodox Christian Youth Movement, and Vice President of the Inter-Church Ecumenical Department of the Church.

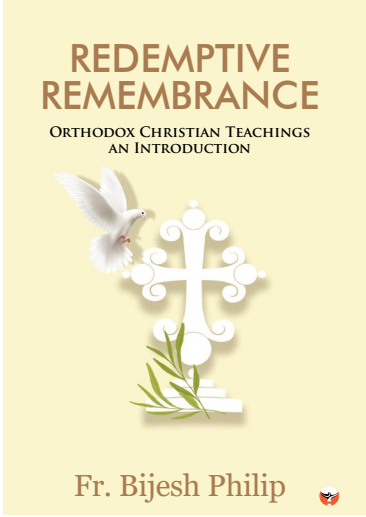
BOOK RELEASE



Mamlo b'Suryoyo: A New Milestone in Spoken Syriac

A significant milestone in Syriac studies was reached during the 1700th Anniversary celebrations of the Synod of Nicaea, held at the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam. During the event, H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan, officially released the new spoken Syriac handbook, Mamlo b'Suryoyo. The first copy was presented to Malankara Malpan Konat Johns Abraham Reesh Corepiscopa.

Authored by Fr. Dr. Varghese P. Varghese Pampakuda, a faculty member of Syriac language and Liturgical Music, the book is designed to make this ancient language accessible to a modern audience. By prioritizing daily conversation over rigid grammatical rules, it allows readers to bypass traditional linguistic barriers. As the first comprehensive English-Syriac spoken language book in India, it features a structured bilingual layout and an extensive glossary of common names. This work is an essential resource for anyone wishing to speak the language of the liturgy with confidence and ease.



Redemptive Remembrance: Orthodox Christian Teachings, an Introduction

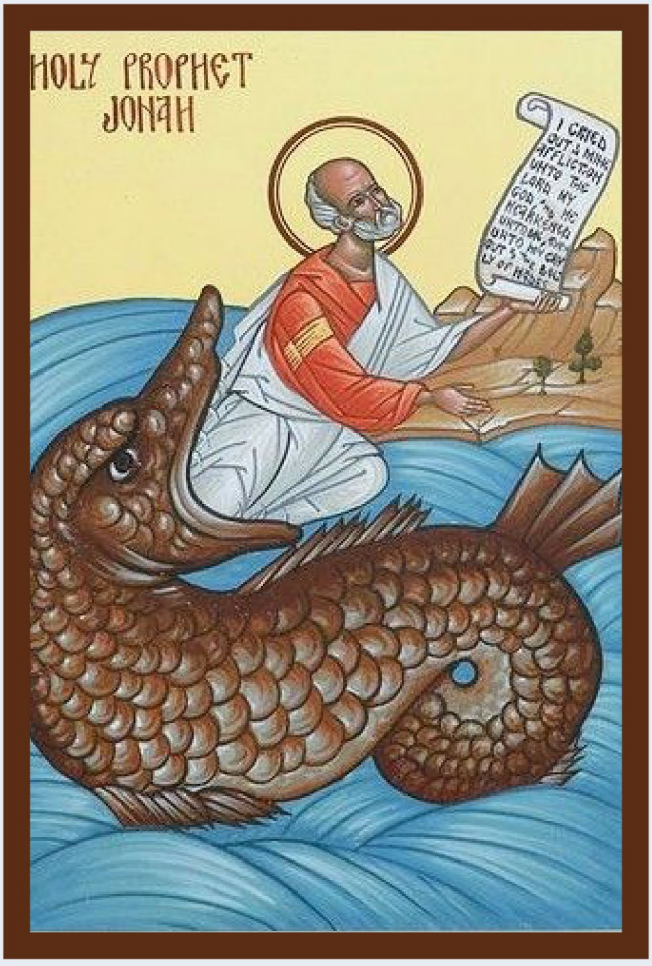
Redemptive Remembrance, authored by Fr. Dr. Bijesh Philip, was released by HH Baselios Mar Thoma Mathews III by giving a copy to H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Chrysostomos on the occasion of the celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the Nicaean Council held at the Orthodox Theological Seminary. 'Redemptive Remembrance' is an invitation to absorb unique insights from ancient Christian wisdom to humanize us today. Due to ignorance coupled with 'isms' like consumerism, scientism, materialism, and communalism, ancient religions decline or continue as a mere cultural entity in many parts of the world. In this context, the book discusses the relevance of the Orthodox Christian faith and practices through a meaningful rereading of the Orthodox Christian theology and spirituality in its twenty-nine chapters. Published by Mazhikkoottu imprint, with a total of 344 pages.

62nd Memorial of

His Holiness Baselios Geevarghese II

2026 JANUARY 3

CATHOLICATE ARAMANA, DEVALOKAM



26–29 January 2026

Nineveh Fast

"Then God saw their works,
that they turned from their evil way;
and God relented from the disaster
that He had said He would bring upon them."

Jonah 3:10 (NKJV)